ISABEL DE BARSAS.

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ISABEL DE BARSAS;

A TRADITION OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

"What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form?"
SHAKSPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ISABEL DE BARSAS.

CHAPTER I.

During the whole of the day, the Count de Barsas was making arrangements for the night's expedition; he ordered his smallest boat to be left in readiness for him, and gave directions for the preparing of a place of confinement for the prisoner who he expected to bring home. So well were affairs disposed, that he considered it impossible that Albert de la Lance should escape him; and was pleased beyond measure at the happy prospect, so unexpectedly given him, of putting an end to all communication between his daughter and her lover. Never did the Marquis de Morbiere stand so high in the estimation of the Count as now; for the information, given to the Countess, must in his opinion have arisen from

mere good will towards the family, and not from any enmity to Albert. Thus thought the Count, but he greatly deceived himself.

Every thing the Marquis said of his rival was false; every accusation groundless, and every word he uttered of him was directed by diabolical malice, a knowledge of the weakness of his hosts, and of the likeliest way to play upon their credulity. He speculated upon chances, and run the risk of detection and exposure; but his plans were fixed, and nothing short of a miracle could, in his opinion, betray the truth.

In the first instance, the Count de Barsas intended to have been doubly strict upon his daughter, and to have removed from her person the aged Dominick who had from her infancy been her own attendant. His attachment for her was known, and he therefore became suspected by his master, who thought it very probable that he might act as go-between to the lovers. Having nothing to do but to attend upon Isabel, he had time and opportunity to carry letters to and from at

any hour of the day. The Marquis had hinted to the Countess that such things *might* happen, and she immediately communicated to her husband the fears to which the suspicion gave rise. But the Count thought the immediate removal of Dominick might create alarm; and determined, after much deliberation, to wait the issue of the coup-de-main which he was to execute.

Isabel had not the least idea of what was going on in the castle. She was not well enough to see any friends but the Duchess and her daughter, from whom every thing relative to her was scrupulously concealed, lest she should open her eyes to the real state of affairs. Robert was so closely spied that he could not have any communication with Albert, and could therefore bring no ease to the anxiety of his sister. Her fears almost distracted her, for she had a presentiment that his life was in danger, and hourly expected the news of his premature death. Such an idea was calculated to aggravate her nervous

affection, which was already so wearing that she could not bear the smallest noise, and hardly the sound of human voices in her room. She endeavoured to resist her malady, by attempts to cheerfulness, but in vain; the more she exerted herself, the more she relapsed into debility from which no medical aid could rouse her. Her doctor said, and justly too, that medicine was no cure for a wounded heart, and with his lovely patient the sad truth of the assertion was evident, and bore ample testimony of the reasonableness of it.

The villain Morbiere, aware of the evil he had brought upon the unhappy lovers, gloried in his heart that his duplicity had been already so successful, and promised himself further triumphs when Carl should have executed the commission intrusted to his care: he was indefatigable in his watchings, and gave his employer great promises of the certainty of the undertaking. He lurked about in the neighbourhood of the castle; sometimes attended by Fortmain, and sometimes alone. In

all these excursions he had but one object in view, to meet with his intended victim and to murder him.

On the morning of the Count's preparation, Carl, as usual, perambulated at some distance from the castle, and perceived a man busily employed felling an ancient oak; every stroke of the axe re-echoed through the forest, and sounded in the ears of the musing murderer, who approached the spot from whence it came.

The wood-cutter seeing Carl approach, dropped his axe in an instant to examine the stranger, who at any other season would have excited his curiosity, but remembering the fêtes at the castle de Barsas, he concluded he must be the attendant of one of the visitors, and resumed his work.

"Wet weather, master," said Carl, halting by the wood-cutter.

"Aye, master," said the other, "the birds of prey are about."

"What of that?" said Carl.

"Why, not much," said the wood-cutter,

"only that when birds of prey are seen, we have a notion hereabouts that evil's at hand; so my grandfather told me when I was a little boy."

"Odd notions, master," said Carl; "and pray tell me what evil can be about now."

"You keep me from my work, that's one evil," replied the wood-cutter. "You are a stranger, and I don't like your looks, that's another evil; and you are lazying away your time it seems, and that's another evil."

"You are surly, old fellow," said Carl.

"Aye, by the spirit of Montfort," exclaimed the wood-cutter, "and enough to make me so, seeing how things are going on in these parts. But you are a stranger, and know nothing of our concerns."

"I may know more than you think for," said Carl, startled at the name of Montfort.

"The worse luck," said the wood-cutter, resuming his employment.

"What's the foolish story about the ghost?" said Carl, "can you tell me any thing about it?"

"It seems you know it already," replied the wood-cutter; "the story may lose by a new version, and I lose time in telling it. Foolish you say; well, well, never mind; it matters little whether the story be foolish or wise, or whether you know it or not; I dare say for all that, you would shake like other folk if you were to meet it."

"I would soon endeavour to meet it," said Carl, whose emotions were visible to the wood-cutter, and who wished to display his superior courage, "but I know not where; some say one place, some say another, an' curse it I can't meet it anywhere."

"I told you the birds of prey were about, and forbode no good," said the wood-cutter, resting upon the helve of his axe, and looking Carl full in the face. "Is it to appear brave, that you curse the spirit which we all bless? Fools and cowards, stranger, curse *what they dare not bless;* the curse be on the head of Montfort's murderer, not on the murdered man's spirit, for it is harmless to them that vex it not: but I would not be warrant for

your safety if *you* were to meet him. Take an old man's advice before we part; bless, and curse not."

"Who the devil would have thought to find a preacher in a leather-coated wood-cutter," vociferated Carl; "have I not a right to curse if I like it?"

"Curse on, and *walk on*," said the wood-cutter calmly; "I hold no converse with men of your cast; but I'll tell you a word before we part, and then I wish to be left to my work. Fearful things are come to pass, and your face is no pledge of better times; mind your neck, master; d'you hear, mind your neck!"

"Why, you cursed old fool," cried the enraged Carl, "are you mad?"

"Neither fool nor mad," replied the wood-cutter; "and well for you if you are in no worse plight than I. I work for my bread, 'tis true, and I earn a honest meal; I bless my employers for it, and curse no one; may you do the same!"

"What do you mean, you old dotard?" said Carl with a sneer of contempt.

"It matters not," said the wood-cutter, "walk on, the clouds are gathering together, and the day looks of evil omen. Mark my words, stranger; mark my words, I say, for there's more in the wind than is seen, and more in the air than is heard. I never saw those birds so busy but that I heard of some foul deed, and I remember that 'twas just such a day as this that brought the news of the murder of young Count de Montfort. The times speak, and tell no good; the birds cry for food of flesh, and the wolves seek their share. Not an hour ago, one passed within few paces of me, and looked as if going to a feast. And what is all this but warning of evil? Mark the times, stranger, and mind yourself, for who knows but the wolves and birds seek *you*? I will cut you off a trusty stick to defend yourself."

"Thank you, old madman," said Carl, "I am armed and fear them not."

"The worse luck," said the wood-cutter.

"How the worse luck?" asked Carl.

"Why, the worse luck, and that's all," said

the wood-cutter, "go your way; I warrant you have other work to do than keep me from doing mine;—I have a family to maintain and must work, so fare you well, master, and see that no harm comes to pass."

Carl, finding the wood-cutter a tighter hand to deal with than exactly suited the errand upon which he was sauntering along, and fearing lest his rising passion might involve him into some unpleasant affair, and be a bar to his more important business, took an abrupt leave of him; and, bestowing a volley of imprecations upon him as he departed, he pursued his walk towards the dwelling of De la Lance.

He mused upon what he had heard, and thought himself suspected; his fears took the alarm, and he was tempted to return and put an end to the wood-cutter's prophesying. He turned round for the purpose, but thought better of it, fearing that he might miss a richer chance.

Under a huge cloak, such as were worn in those days, he carried a dagger, and a cross-bow with several short steel pointed bolts, barbed

and turned inwards, so as to prevent their being drawn out unless by surgical assistance. Carl prided himself upon being a first rate marksman; and, having already exercised his arm in the service of the Marquis de Morbiere, he had little doubt of taking good aim, should the wished-for object make his appearance.

Fortmain had collected from what fell from Carl enough to excite serious alarms for the safety of Albert; he therefore left the castle at an early hour, and, taking the circuitous course which he generally followed, he made for his dwelling with a view to warn him of the impending danger, and to assist him to the best of his power to avoid the desperate attempt to be again made upon his life.

It fortunately happened that Albert was at home; and Fortmain lost no time in telling him of the fears which were created by what he collected from the hints of Carl; he likewise informed him of the danger in which he had been from the castle tower, and expressed his astonishment that he should have put off as he

did. Albert explained the whole circumstance, and thought Fortmain could inform him who the person was that saved his life, but it was a mystery difficult to unravel, and not to be explained as yet; chance might do what investigation could not, and time might discover the benevolent person who rendered him a service too great to be repaid.

Albert was much struck by the detail of the faithful Fortmain, and promised to attend to his advice, and keep away from the castle of Barsas, until he should be able to give him such information as would insure his safety, and the possibility of proceeding without the risk of being murdered.

Fortmain assured Albert that he would for his sake remain at the castle, and second in appearance the views of the Marquis de Morbiere, at least as far as was in his power; as it was the only way to frustrate his endeavours to obtain Isabel.

Albert joyfully accepted Fortmain's offer to convey a letter to her, but doubted the possibility of its ever reaching her; the trusty man,

however, promised to get it delivered, and undertook the task with so much zeal that Albert penned a hasty letter, and, having intrusted it to him, allowed him to return to the castle, for fear of being detected, or suspected of having communicated with him.

Though short, his letter was calculated to endear him more than ever to the heart of Isabel, for he expressed himself in the fondest language, and told her that no trial or danger could ever alter the sentiments upon which he founded all his hopes of future happiness. He besought her to have courage, and not let herself be frightened into any step that could at a future period cause her sorrow or discomfort. He represented the necessity of resisting the Marquis de Morbiere, and of giving a firm denial to all his propositions, for the least concession; the slightest appearance of commiseration for his professed love, and the most trifling promise of consideration, would be construed by the Marquis, the Count and Countess de Barsas, into absolute and unconditional consent, and carry along with it a train of consequences too

serious to be named, and too heart-breaking and dangerous to be a moment thought of.

He had no doubt but that Isabel would feel the whole force of the argument, and would exert herself to do away at once with every hope of success. He asked not if her sentiments were unaltered, for he knew them to be unalterable; he inquired not whether she thought of him, for he felt assured that he was always present to her imagination; he therefore confined himself to expressions of his own love, and to the most earnest entreaties that she would take care of herself, and not sink under the weight of afflictions by which she was oppressed. He again requested her to trust to Fortmain in case of necessity, and not to doubt the sincerity of his devotion to their cause.

Knowing that Carl was from the castle, Fortmain scrupulously avoided the shorter cuts, and took a more circuitous road than that by which he went. He reached the castle at a late hour in the afternoon, and resumed his post in the guard-room without being questioned upon the cause of his absence. Upon

all occasions it was his policy to think much and say little; he was therefore the last person meddled with, and not subject to the flippant investigations which so often arise from the mere effects of curiosity, and without an idea beyond that of passing away time at the expence of another man's pursuits.

On account of his taciturnity, he was looked upon as the bugbear of the castle, and only associated with a few men who knew some of his good qualities, or liked him for his inoffensive conduct.

But it was not at all times that Fortmain was so quiet; if roused by insult, or by any other unfortunate cause, he was the most alert of the Barsas' vassals, and exhibited a coolness, which proved that he was careless of danger and brave at the heart. For this particular merit he had often been distinguished; and it was this reputation of strength of mind and silence of tongue which first induced Carl to try his willingness to serve his employer, and made him rely upon him as implicitly as he did, in the business for which he deemed few fitted,

and in which he had hitherto associated none but certain ruffians who were still in the employ of his master, and waiting in the neighbourhood until their services should be required by the wretch on whose pay they existed.

During all this time, the ever-investigating jester was busily employed in trying to find out some new misdeed of his master, and exerted his ingenuity so indefatigably, that not one of his attendants escaped his scrutinizing inquiries, and he cross-questioned so adroitly, that the truth must have come out if they had been possessed of any information likely to be useful to him. Far from affording him any further knowledge, they endeavoured to gain some explanation of his extraordinary conduct, and more freely told whatever the jester could tell, without betraying the important secret of which he had made himself master when concealed between the two doors, during the interview between the Marquis and Carl.

He wished Albert and Isabel every happiness, and would willingly have passed another

evening of terror in the dungeon, if he had been sure to render them a service worthy so great a sacrifice.

In his quality of jester, Baba did not scruple to use his master's reputation with a tolerable degree of frankness; and among the concourse of domestics assembled at the castle, he amused himself with describing him in colours well suited to his real character, and calculated to open their eyes on a man for whom he entertained the greatest contempt. His assertions, however, were made with prudence, and his hints were so well turned, that he almost drew the picture from the lips of the inquirers, and gave it additional colouring by half acknowledgments, which often mean more than the fluency of the tongue can express.

One sorrow poor Baba had really at heart, and that was the long absence of Margaret, whose duties upon her afflicted mistress prevented her affording him a single interview since several evenings. In the tenderness of his heart he wept bitterly; but his natural benevolence overcame his grief, and he consoled

himself with the idea that whilst he vexed and pined away, she attended her lady as a faithful good girl, and sacrificed to duty the tribute of gratitude for kindness and protection. Whenever Baba gave way to such thoughts, he ceased to consider himself, and indulged in feelings the most honourable and praiseworthy; for he esteemed charity as the greatest human perfection, and was happy to find in others that which he himself delighted to practise.

CHAPTER II.

After sun-set, the Count de Barsas retired from his guests, and repaired to the boat which had, in obedience to his command, been left in readiness for him. He was completely armed, and had provided himself with every thing necessary to secure his prize: even attendance had been thought of, for he stationed Adrien and a few trusty vassals on the other side of the river, who were destined to protect him in case of resistance, and to aid in the capture, as it might be necessary to have the assistance of such a reinforcement. This escort was likewise thoroughly armed, and capable (in number) of a much more formidable undertaking than the one in which they were embarked. Such a retinue, and so thoroughly prepared for an unlawful act against the life and liberty of an innocent man, or indeed of any man, short of a public offender, was at once unwarrantable as it was violent, and cruel as it

was unjust. The law of the strongest was in those days the chief instrument for deciding private feuds; and the impetuosity of martial customs, unchecked, unpolished by the refining hand of education, which was so much more attended to in the succeeding ages and so little in the age of which we are now speaking, reduced the weakest to a state of dependance almost bordering upon slavery.

It was an anxious time that was passed in waiting for Albert de la Lance, and particularly so with the Count, who was in momentary expectation of seeing his boat glide towards him upon the ruffled surface of the water. It was getting late, and he thought it time to take up his position, which had been previously determined; he accordingly pushed off, and paddled towards the tower inhabited by his daughter, under whose window he meant to station himself, being exactly opposite the spot occupied by the remainder of the party on the other side of the river.

Carl was returning to the castle when the Count pushed off his skiff; the sound of the

oar struck like magic upon his ear, and he stole to the water-side to ascertain whether it was really the long-expected Albert who dared come again under the window of his mistress. Though the night was dark and stormy, Carl had no doubt that the person in the boat was the one of whom he had all day been in search; he therefore concealed himself as near as possible to the tower, and placed himself so as to have a command of the situation occupied by De la Lance at the time when the last attempt was made upon his life.

He put his cloak aside, and charged his cross-bow with a barbed-bolt, and then, laying himself flat upon the ground, he applied the but-end to his shoulder and took steady aim at the skiff as it came towards him.

The Count de Barsas had just taken up his position when he received a severe wound from the bow of the assassin Carl; he uttered a loud shriek, and fell over into the water. The party on the opposite bank seeing him fall, concluded that the boat had upset by his standing upright in it, or that the roughness

of the water was the cause of the accident; they lost no time, however, in going to his assistance, and two of the ablest from among them threw off their vests, and plunged into the water to save him.

Owing to the rapidity of the stream, it was long ere they could reach the body as it floated down, and considerable time elapsed before it was safely landed on the castle side.

The Count de Barsas was immediately carried into the castle and every expedient was resorted to in order to restore him to life, which appeared quite extinct. No sooner had they succeeded in their endeavours, than a vast quantity of blood flowed from the wound. The real cause of his fall into the water was now discovered, and, having undressed him, they found that the bolt had gone deep into the thigh, and had broken short off almost level with the flesh; probably from the violence with which he fell from the boat. Adrien immediately went to apprise his mother of the event. When he entered the drawing-room, he found her in earnest conference with the Marquis de Mor-

biere; and briefly stated to them what had happened. The Countess was horror-struck at the detail, and rushed out to the assistance of her husband; the Marquis followed her, and appeared no less grieved than herself. On this occasion, as on all others, he had recourse to deception to conceal his real feelings, which were of terror lest his emissaries should have committed the deed which filled the castle with alarm. It was fortunate for him that he and the Countess were alone when the news was brought them, for he would probably have had to encounter many looks of inquiry and some of accusation, which, as it was, he had been lucky enough to escape. When they reached the room in which the Count had been carried, the Countess gave way to every expression of despair, and loudly accused Albert de la Lance of being her husband's murderer. The idea was immediately hit upon by the Marquis, who in appearance pitied her with all his heart, and swore that he would willingly lay down his life to avenge his friend.

Robert had been one of the first to run to his father's assistance, and was busily employed with the doctor in endeavouring to extricate the fatal weapon which was deep buried in his flesh. When he heard his friend so wrongfully accused of a barbarous crime, his cheeks flushed with indignation, and he turned to the Marquis with a look of menace which would have spoken volumes at any other time ; but at present he was taking care of himself in accusing another, and thought it too important to turn off all suspicion of him, to care for looks or words, however insulting and pointed they might be.

The doctor was skilful, and would have extracted the bolt had it been practicable, but the barbs were numerous, and he declared it impossible unless the Count would submit to an operation, which he said might be performed without imminent danger, although it would be extremely tedious and painful. As the case admitted of no alternative, the patient was obliged to assent, and was removed into his own

chamber, where the doctor succeeded in extracting the fatal weapon.

The Count de Barsas bore the operation with tolerable fortitude, and the violence of pain seemed to have softened the natural irritability of his temper, for he was calm, and if he vented an expression of impatience, it was that the confinement which must necessarily follow should disable him of taking revenge of the author of his sufferings. It was useless for the medical gentleman to entreat his patient to be quiet and silent; of Albert de la Lance he would speak, and appeared furious whenever the thought came across his mind, but when it had passed off he was calm again.

Robert attempted to vindicate his friend, and assured his parents that their suspicions were groundless, and that he was too generous to take an unfair advantage of any man, however aggravated or insulted he might be. But his effort was overruled by the insinuations of the Marquis de Morbiere who gave it as his opinion, that a man so desperately in love, and an adventurer, would not scruple to commit a deed

which might be difficult to be brought home to him.

"The evil is done," said he, pressing the Count's hand; "Robert may have his doubts, but *I have none*, and I will avenge your sufferings! You know my devotion to the honour of your house."

A smile passed across the Count's lips as he heard the welcome assurance, and with as strong a pressure of the hand as his feeble state would admit, he gave and sanctioned an action as detestable as that which had reduced him to his present situation.

The manner in which the Count received the wound gave rise to much speculation, and the Countess anxiously inquired the origin of the affair, without being able to obtain any satisfactory information. The Marquis said it did not signify, for the guilt was the same whether he had been wounded within or without the castle. Adrien held his peace, and the other attendants who had accompanied the Count being still in the room, a mutual understanding was necessary to evade her questions and to maintain

secrecy upon the object of the expedition which had subjected him to the sufferings he now endured, and which he richly deserved, as his own intentions were not more honourable than those of the person who had inflicted the wound. Probably the Count felt the force of a reasoning which must more than once have presented itself to his imagination, but he seldom gave ear to such admonitions as originated from a disturbed conscience, and listened to nothing save the effects of passion and thirst of revenge, which he determined to accomplish, should the Marquis's promise be unfulfilled, or should the object of his hatred escape the destiny that awaited him.

It was visible enough to the physician, that his lord thought more than he was willing to express, and he had some serious alarms lest he had embarked in some perilous undertaking which had proved fatal to him; but he was prudent, and carefully avoided all inquiry which might lead to an explanation, perhaps unfavourable to himself, or to Isabel, whose happiness he had truly at heart, and whose

interest he wished to second by obtaining every information in his power, without appearing to be more devoted to one party than the other. In this dispassionate mode of acting, he became conversant with all the affairs of the family, and weighed in his own mind the several merits of both parties, so that he knew which to assist in case of necessity, and which to advise whenever his opinion was asked in matters which did not regard his profession. In the Doctor therefore, Isabel and Albert de la Lance had a friend, who wished them well, and who would do any thing to contribute to their happiness; but his bread depended upon the Count and Countess de Barsas, and he was obliged to dissemble, in order to shelter himself from the storm of their resentment and from the inevitable ruin which would follow the detection of his real sentiments. Whenever Isabel was talked of he turned the conversation to her health, without allowing an opinion to pass his lips or blaming a person who possessed his warmest sympathy.

Knowing that no good could result to either

of his patients by the confusion which existed in the Count's chamber, he desired that he might be left alone, as fever would certainly succeed the operation he had undergone, and as its effects could only be modified by the greatest quiet and silence. In consequence of this opinion the Countess gave the example and retired, followed by the Marquis de Morbiere, Adrien, Robert, and the remainder of the persons assembled, with the exception of the Count's own man who was allowed to remain in attendance upon him.

With the help of some quieting medicine, the patient soon forgot his sufferings in the enjoyment of repose, and, owing to the loss of blood which had profusely flowed from the wound, he was free from the mental agitation which is generally produced by soporifics.

The Doctor remained in the room, and watched the progress of the fever upon his patient; he was rather alarmed with the appearances which manifested themselves, but employed his skill to so much purpose, that as the night advanced the symptoms seemed

to abate, and he had the gratification of finding by his pulse that he was less feverish than before.

When the Countess returned to the saloon she was met by the greater number of her guests, who, hearing of the catastrophe had left their apartments to condole with her and inquire into the cause of the accident. But here she was much puzzled; not being able to give them any information, save that the fatal weapon had been extracted, and the Count in a fair way of doing well; the Doctor being of opinion that the wound was not dangerous, although extremely painful and severe.

Adrien, however, who never lost an opportunity of saying something against the unfortunate de la Lance, accused him of being the author of the deed, and swore to atone for it by taking his life in exchange for the one that had been attempted.

The Duchess de Briançon who read in the looks of Robert the falseness of the accusation, could not contain her anger and exclaimed with great spirit, "It is false, Sir; I will stake

my life that the Sieur de la Lance is as incapable of such an action as my own self."

"I think so too," said the Baron de Ferneuf; "he is too brave a man to murder another in the dark, or even to take his life when fairly forfeited; we know that by his lenity to the Marquis de Morbieré."

"He acted like a coward," exclaimed Adrien, "for he placed his foot upon his breast."

"It was nobly done," said Ferneuf, "and moreover, had I been in Albert's place, I would have dashed out his brains with my battle-axe. The Marquis de Morbiere covered himself with disgrace, and I do not hesitate to say so."

"Whoever insults the Marquis, insults *me*, Sir," said Adrien.

"Very likely," said the Baron calmly, "and I beg to repeat my opinion, whether *Monsieur* Adrien likes it or not."

The Countess thought it high time to interfere, and desired her son to be more moderate, adding however, "You know Monsieur le Baron, that we *must* deem every thing said against the Marquis de Morbière, as a slight to our-

selves, for he is our friend, and as such we cannot bear to hear him insulted."

"You are right, Madam," replied the nettled Baron, "and as I allow the justice of your remark with regard to the Marquis de Morbiere, you will excuse me if I repeat the same with regard to Albert de la Lance, who I am proud to say, I consider as my friend, and will not allow him therefore to be accused in my presence. I hope Monsieur Adrien will take the warning, as I shall henceforward consider myself seriously insulted if I hear him mentioned disrespectfully."

The tone of this address imposed silence at once, and no one seemed desirous to renew a subject in which the majority concurred in opinion. The Countess bit her lips with rage, and Adrien was particularly fierce, but neither of them thought fit to resume the altercation. The Baron de Rochefort had been a silent witness to the scene, but he lost none of its merits, and determined to leave this divided family for his more peaceful castle.

Indeed the determination to leave the castle

was pretty general, and occasioned by the continual state of warfare which existed in the family, the ill usage of the universally beloved Isabel, and the event which had just taken place, to the eminent terror of all the female visitors and the great discomfort of the males, for the safety of every one seemed threatened, and there was no knowing how far hostilities might be carried.

There is something in murder so repugnant to human nature, that where an attempt has been made to commit it, the place is instantly deserted, and the most fertile plain, the most inhabited district, becomes little better than a desert when it serves as a retreat to the assassin.

A few days made a wonderful change in the opinion entertained of the Marquis de Morbiere. His desire to personate the coxcomb had been taken for vanity, and his flippancy had been overlooked as a natural defect of intellect; at present however, opinions changed, and he was shunned on account of his baseness at the tournament, as well as for

the suspicions which arose with regard to his real character. It was evident that he was playing a double game; and that his great assiduity to the Countess was from no other motive than to form an alliance with her family. When he inquired after Isabel there was no affection in his manner, and his mention of her never gave the least intimation of respect or of an exalted opinion of the qualities of her heart and mind. Indeed he mostly confined himself to complaints and expressed his mortification that she should allow herself to be seduced from her duty to her parents, by a man of whose honour he made a sport, and whose existence he did not scruple to declare would terminate at his hands.

The opportunity offered him by the wound inflicted on the Count was a glorious triumph to him, and the revenge which he in his baseness had secretly sworn against Albert de la Lance (but which he broached not for fear of consequences previous to the present melancholy occasion) he now openly boasted of, and made himself a merit of ridding his much

esteemed friend of a dangerous tenant, who, unless put out of the way, would in his pretended opinion, make good the murder which he accused him of having attempted.

The Duchess de Briançon and the other numerous guests soon retired to their rooms, and many of them gave orders for leaving the castle the next morning. They had passed several days in discomfort and insipid sameliness, and seeing no prospect of pleasanter times, they rather chose to change quarters than to witness the conduct of their hosts and of the Marquis de Morbiere.

Isabel's illness was truly mortifying to her friends, who had always found in her a cheerful companion, and who loved her for the numberless amiable qualities which ought to have endeared her to her parents and have led them to make every sacrifice to ensure her happiness. But it frequently happens that those whose duty it is to appreciate the virtues of others are blind to them, and are the last to bring comfort to their minds when labouring under sickness and affliction. Such was the case

with Isabel, and she felt the unkindness of her parents the more as she had no sister, and that Susan, her dearest friend, talked of her mother's early return to the castle of Briançon.

When all the company had left the saloon, the Countess de Barsas went to make inquiries after her wounded lord. She found him awake, and tolerably easy; he had had a good sleep, which had considerably refreshed him, and although he had much fever, his situation was not so painful as it would have been, had less fortunate measures been resorted to by the Doctor, who still continued his attendance, and paid the Count every attention in his power.

To the many questions of the Countess her husband gave no satisfactory reply, but betrayed so much agitation that she was again requested to defer further interrogatories to another time. The Doctor represented the danger of them at the present moment, and she was compelled to submit; she therefore gave ecessary orders for the night, and retired to h adjoiningchamber which had been prepared for her.

CHAPTER III.

No sooner had the Marquis de Morbiere taken leave of the Countess, than he hastened in search of Carl, who he had ordered to wait for him in a secluded part of the castle, into which he had taken refuge after inflicting the wound upon the Count de Barsas. Not having had the least communication with any one since doing the deed, he was impressed with an idea that he had killed Albert de la Lance, and waited in the pleasurable expectation of receiving the whole price promised for the murder, without giving any part of it to Fortmain, whose services he had obtained upon general terms and intended to repay according to his pleasure. For although his master was willing that the two should share alike he left the management to Carl, knowing the folly of an attempt to controul him or to inforce any terms

but his own. This man's ascendancy over his employer was so great that he doubted not of being able to lead him into what bargain he liked best, and knew his power too well to let him off short of a heavy purse.

Muffled up in his cloak, and with a broad hat pulled over his face, the titled assassin stole through the long galleries, and reached the place of rendezvous without being perceived by any one.

" *Qui-vive?*" cried Carl, grasping his dagger—" 'Tis I, Carl," replied Morbiere, approaching nearer.

" The deed is done an' curse him," exclaimed the wretch in a tone of triumph; " I saw him fall."

" You saw the wrong man fall," said the Marquis.

" That's a lie," interrupted Carl.

" It is not; you wounded the Count de Barsas," said the Marquis.

" Nonsense, master, d'you take me for a fool?"

"No Carl," replied the other. "I know you are no fool, but you took the wrong man, and wounded the Count de Barsas."

"The devil I did?" said Carl, quite astotonished at the news.

"'Tis true," said the Marquis; "but, tell me Carl, how came you to meet with him?"

Carl explained how he had seen the boat, and the position it took, and attributed the mistake to the darkness of the night, making at the same time some rather jocular apology for giving the Marquis so much unnecessary trouble.

"You did so much, that you might as well have killed the Count at once," said Morbiere.

"So I think," replied the willing assassin, "but we must *do* the other first."

"Yes," said Morbiere, "send him to the devil, and the old fellow after him. How do you think they account for the attempt to kill him? They say that Albert did it to get the girl!"

"Excellent," exclaimed Carl, "and how do they mean to serve him now?"

"I have undertaken to punish him," replied the Marquis.

"Still better," repeated Carl, "we'll have rare fun with him, an' curse him. Cut him to bits like a worm, and see whether he will come together again. Cut slices out of him, and fill the holes with pepper. Rare sport master; why, we shan't have had such fun since we served out old ———."

"Hush, Carl, keep your peace, man," said the Marquis; "a word may undo us."

"What's the use of staying in this d—'d castle, if we can't talk as we like?"

"To tell you the truth, Carl, I'm tired of it already."

"So am I," replied Carl. "Let us be off and take the girl to boot. What think you master? you can do as you please then: marry her or not; and as for marriage, where's the use of that, when you can get her without. I tell you what, you and I shall make another

bargain, as we did once before; I'll help you to the mistress, and you'll help me to the maid; and if this does'n't suit you, why, be d—'d to you, you may go to hell by yourself."

"The plan would be excellent," said Morbiere, "if it was not for the money."

"Get the girl you fool," said Carl, "and then put your own price, or send her the dog's way, and have done with her."

"We'll do it, Carl."

"That's right," said the other; and they agreed upon putting the plan into execution.

"Now I think of it, Carl," said the Marquis, after some consideration, and placing his hand upon his associate's folded arm; "there's more difficulty in the plan than first appeared; how the devil are we ever to get the girl through the castle without being seen or heard? She might be hid, but she will roar like a lion and alarm the whole place; plague take the castle, the courts, and the people about them; I don't see how we can manage it."

"Leave that to me, master," said Carl, winking his eye; "I'll manage it all, with one

condition, however, that when we've got the mistress you will help me to the maid. I saw this Margaret the other day as she went through the long gallery, and I am determined to have her."

"Depend upon me, Carl," said the Marquis, "but if you marry, shall I lose your services?"

"Marry? ha! ha! ha! I marry? No more make such a fool of myself than you, brother sportsman. We keep no priests at our castle, we like better company, ha! ha! ha! Give us the girls, and let *them* marry that can't help it."

"Meet me here about this time to-morrow night, and be ready with your forces. I leave the management to you; you shall be well paid, and have the maid if you succeed."

"Leave that to me," said Carl, rubbing his hands together, and delighted with the promise; "I'll manage it for you, an' curse me; if I don't succeed the devil take me. Now master, begging your pardon, I think it would be well for you to go in again, you may be missed, and I perhaps discovered."

"You are a prudent fellow, Carl; good night

then, mind your work." So saying, and with a hearty shake of the hand, the Marquis left Carl, and having muffled himself up in the same manner as when he came to him he returned to his apartment, where, to his utter astonishment and mortification, he found the jester.—It was necessary to dissemble; and, putting on as good a face as he could, he said, "I thought you were a-bed, Baba."

"No Sir, I know my duty better; I found you were out, and thought it most respectful to wait for you."

"Thank you, my good Baba," said the hypocrite; "I have been very unwell, and have been walking about the castle courts for a little air: you may well conceive how much affected I have been by the Count's misfortune."

"So I suppose, Sir," replied Baba; "It is very natural in your situation; who in the world could have been guilty of the crime; do you know, Sir?"

"Not I, Baba," replied the Marquis, "but

there can be little doubt that Albert de la Lance was the assassin. I am sorry for him, for it will probably cost him his life."

"I wonder that *he* should do it," said Baba; "why Sir, the servants won't hear of it; they say the *Sieur* Albert is as good a man as ever breathed, and it was but an hour ago that I quarrelled with one of them for saying that you were more likely to be concerned in the deed than any one."

"I, Baba?" exclaimed the guilty Marquis, "abominable accusation; shameful, detestable; tell me who the man is, I will have him this moment punished."

"I cannot, dare not, Sir; but I contradicted the report, and assured them that you were incapable of so deadly an offence. I must however hold my tongue, remembering the old Abbott's saying, *Vir sapit qui scit ratione tacere*, and not tell you who the man was that said it; for, if I do, he will never speak before me again, and I shall lose more than could be gained by my betraying him."

"Well, I think you right there," said the Marquis; "contradict the report, and you will serve me."

"I do Sir," said Baba, "I do!"

During this dialogue Baba closely examined his master's countenance, and read in it all that he had been fishing for. The jester had on this, as on many other occasions, watched the Count's movements; he had seen him hasten through the long gallery, descend into the court, and make for the second court. Without endangering himself, he thought it enough to judge of what was going on, and fancied his errand was to give further orders for the murder of Albert de la Lance.—The idea was not unfounded; murder was the object in view, and Albert was not the last victim proposed.

The Marquis, on his part, kept the jester at bay by his deep penetrating looks; his purpose being known, it was ably defeated, and he could see nothing in his favourite servant, but what appeared to flow from a devoted heart, and from a man entirely igno-

rant of the crimes of his master. Indeed, Baba had been so long in the Marquis's service that he had discovered the necessity of dissembling, if circumstances required, and did it so artfully, that in spite of his penetration he could not detect him in any thing bearing the shape of suspicion, or a knowledge of his haunts. Silence having prevailed for some moments, the Marquis broke it to dismiss Baba for the night.

" Go to bed Baba," said he, " you must be tired. Come to me as early as you can in the morning."

" Can I not be of use to undress you, Sir?" said Baba.

" No, not to-night," replied the Marquis. " Good night."

Baba wished his master good night, and took his candle to withdraw; he opened the door, uttered a loud scream, and fell senseless upon the floor. The Marquis at the same time stood trembling, and ready to sink, as the ghost of the murdered Montfort stood before him. The plumes in the spectre's helmet

waved in terrific agitation, and his armour seemed to reflect ten thousand times the lights which were burning in the room. The spirit held within its deadly grasp the huge battle-axe, and its whole appearance was calculated to freeze the warmest heart and stay the bloodiest hand.

When the spirit had reached the centre of the room, it stood motionless, the plumes still quivering as before. As it advanced, the Marquis retreated, and kept at the same distance as when he first saw it.

The guilty Morbiere was more dead than alive; yet his fears had not so entirely overcome him as the jester's; he trembled convulsively, and gradually retreated, the spectre following him step by step, until he got against the wall, when it approached still nearer and raised it's battle-axe as in the act of cleaving his head asunder. Giving up all hope, and overcome by his perilous situation, not doubting that his last hour was come, he sunk down upon his knees, and clasping his hands together in the agonies of despair, he implored the spirit to

spare his life. The spectre seemed unmoved, with it's battle-axe still in the act of striking; the humbled wretch could bear no more, and, like the jester, sank to the floor, completely deprived of his faculties.

After a while Baba began to recover and trembling like a leaf ventured to look up, but the spectre had vanished, and he could see nothing but his fallen master, who, he concluded, had met with the punishment he so richly deserved for his many crimes. With much exertion he rose, and, with faultering steps approached the Marquis. He now discovered his fears to be groundless, as he breathed, but his face and hands were covered with cold perspiration and he was convulsed with violent trembling. Baba rubbed his temples with some spirituous perfumes from his toilet and succeeded after a time in restoring him to his senses.

In the same manner as his servant had done, and, if possible in greater agony than he had suffered, the Marquis ventured to look up, and finding himself alone with Baba, soon

began to recover, and in a little time was able to get upon his legs.

"Where's the ghost?" said he, in a hoarse voice; "is it gone?"

"God be praised!" replied Baba, weeping bitterly, "the poor spirit is gone: what a horrible sight: what can bring it here? How comes this room to be haunted?"

Agitated as the Marquis was, he saw the necessity of turning off the jester's inquiries, and said, "I cannot tell what brings it here. Perhaps this room was a favourite haunt: I must ask the Countess to change it for another."

"What's the use of that," said Baba; "has not the spirit the power of going where it pleases, and of visiting one room as well as another? I wish I had been a-bed, it would not have molested me, I warrant; and heaven grant I may never see it again. To-morrow morning I will go to the fairy island and offer something, or have a mass said to the Virgin for the repose of his soul."

"It was very horrible, Baba," said the Mar-

quis; "and still, what can there be in a spirit to frighten one, save the outward appearance? It can't hurt. I do think if it was to come again, I would try my strength with it."

"Nonsense, Sir," replied Baba, who was quite shocked with his master's foolhardiness: "do you presume to think you could finger a spirit, or prevail against it? How is it that men cannot control their own spirits? Let me beseech you, Sir, to have a mass said in the castle chapel, it may be the wisest way."

"Why, you credulous fool," exclaimed the Marquis, "how do you think that could be of any use? Hang the ghost, I say; I don't know why we should be more afraid of a dead man than a living one: and yet I must own I was frightened. Let us have a glass of cordial, Baba, and put a little of your opium into it; I think it may do us good, and help us to sleep. You had better not venture out of the room to-night, and may lie upon my bed if you will. I think it will be safer for you."

"If you will excuse me, Sir," said Baba, "I would rather go to my own room; I have

left one of the candles burning, and am afraid of fire. Besides, all your goods are open and may fall into bad hands. Pray allow me to leave you when I have given you the cordial; I need rest, for my poor legs will hardly carry me, and at all events I cannot see any thing more horrible than I have seen here, go where I will."

"You had better not," said the Marquis, who spoke for himself, not wishing to be left alone.

Baba insisted, and he thought it most prudent to allow him to please himself.

Left to his own meditations, the Marquis paced the room with excessive terror and dared not venture into bed for fear of again beholding the dreadful object which had caused him such fright. Finding that this occupation did not turn his thoughts from the fearful vision, he sat himself down, and seriously considered his situation. His meditations were, however, of no avail, and only tended to strengthen his determination to have Isabel at any rate,

and to shelter himself from danger by the murder of her lover.

In the foulness of his heart he cursed the spirit, and bade it defiance, called the devil to witness his contempt of it, and prayed that it was but flesh and bone to have it murdered again.

Such a frame of mind was ill suited for rest, and the Marquis would probably have felt no inclination to sleep if Baba had not given him a strong dose of opium in his cordial. He often had recourse to this kind of medicine, and it failed not, as on other occasions, to hush for a time the stings of conscience, and procure him a few hours' sleep. He got into bed, and soon fell into a kind of turbulent slumber which could not be called rest, although it was partly a suspension of the violent feelings with which he had been assailed.

Much as Baba had been frightened by the spirit of the murdered Montfort, his conscience was at peace with him, and he attributed its appearance to the crimes of his master, and to

the natural supposition that blood will have blood. Never having shed a drop of human blood in all his life, the honest jester had little to fear from the spirit of a murdered man; still, he was not void of terror; on the contrary, he could scarcely stand upon his legs, or dared look about him. The moment he got into his room he went down upon his knees, and prayed forgiveness for all his sins, as if preparing for another world; his own eloquence brought tears into his eyes, and they gradually increased, until he sobbed aloud, and worked himself into a fit of despair, from which he was a long time recovering.

Baba had again cause to remember the old Abbot, who often spoke to him of the comforts of religion, and almost determined to return to him and go into orders. But to this plan his love for Margaret presented an insurmountable barrier, and he ceased to think of the ministry whenever his mind dwelt upon his mistress. Tired of thinking, and some-

what quieted by prayer, he laid his weary head upon his pillow, and in a few minutes went fast to sleep, forgetting his sorrows and the spirit of Montfort.

CHAPTER IV.

ISABEL's health continued in the same precarious state; she was not able to leave her room, and her spirits were so bad that she could with great difficulty bear the sound of voices, or even the unavoidable noises which were made in her apartments, the quiet of which was preserved as much as possible by the attentive Dominick and his affectionate daughter, whose love for her mistress rendered her careful of every thing that could contribute to her comfort, or in any degree lessen her sufferings.

Isabel's sweetness of temper was never more captivatingly pourtrayed than during her illness, and the kind of imprisonment to which she was subjected. Heart-breaking as the steps were that had hitherto been pursued she complained not, nor was there the least visible symptoms of impatience to be detected in her,

either towards her cruel parents, or for the sufferings which she endured.

Fortmain had brought considerable relief to her anxious mind by the letter which he managed to send her by the ever trusty Dominick; and one great source of sorrow was partly removed by knowing that Albert's enemies had not prevailed against him and that he was well. But, cheering as this was, the consolation was not without alloy, for Fortmain declared it impossible to convey a letter to De la Lance for many days, or to be the bearer of any message from him to Isabel, as the number of spies set about his dwelling and the castle, rendered an attempt to communicate mad in the extreme.

It would have been endangering his safety and her own to have done any thing in contradiction to the advice of the trusty man, and she was therefore compelled to silence, and to a suspension of intercourse, which, although it had already so long existed, was worse than death to her.

These accumulated sorrows were calculated

to sour the temper of an angel; yet she complained not, and her sighs and her tears, her colourless cheeks and emaciated hands, were the only visible indications of the sorrow which consumed her heart. She spoke little, 'tis true, but that little which she said, was spoken with her usual sweetness, and if her voice had lost its brilliancy, it had lost none of its softness.

The kind-hearted Susan continued by her friend's bedside; she too was unhappy, for she saw little of Robert, owing to the precautions which were necessary to his sister's safety. Whenever they met in Isabel's room their expressions of mutual affection quite delighted her, and although their unrestrained intercourse was consoling to her, it never failed to awaken her to a sense of her own situation and consequently to the pinings of grief. It was particularly upon these occasions that she exerted herself to suppress her feelings, and so desirous was she to conceal them, that she fancied they did not detect the real state of her mind; she was nevertheless mistaken, for

Susan watched every change in her countenance, and Robert who from his earliest years had been her companion, saw even better than the amiable girl, what was passing in her heart. These reciprocal inquiries and anxieties often brought tears to their eyes, and rendered them as truly unhappy as if they themselves were parted under similar circumstances.

Had the Countess de Barsas possessed more feeling, and had the least pity for her daughter's sufferings, she would have spared her and not have communicated the news of her father's accident. The first thing she did in the morning after the event was to send her word of it by her maid, without explaining any particulars or giving the smallest insight into the affair, save that she hoped it would cure her of her love for that worthless man, the Sieur de la Lance. Such a message was too revolting to be borne, and although Isabel was truly grieved for her father, yet she had spirit enough to chide the maid for the manner in which she brought a message as unjust as it was insulting. The woman was nettled at

the manner in which she had been received with what she conceived a very honourable message, and bearing no partiality to her, she returned to her mistress and so distorted Isabel's remark, or gave it with so much impertinent levity, that the Countess determined to punish her daughter for her presumption and not to go near her for some days.

Susan happened to be in the sick room when the message was brought to Isabel; she started up with indignation, and was going to make some comment in the maid's presence, when she was checked by a look from our heroine, who conveyed as much as she wished to impress, which was, that it would be imprudent to say any thing. Susan took the hint and was silent; but she perhaps thought the more of it, and when Robert came to pay his morning visit, she told him of what had happened.

He could hardly believe that his mother could be so mad as to send a servant to her daughter with so unfeeling a message, and declared his belief that her only object was to humble her, and to bring her by degrees to

that low and degrading state of submission which would make her submit to any thing she might propose, and finally to accepting the blood-red hand of the murderer of Philip de Montfort.

From Robert, Isabel obtained so much information as had already transpired, and he told her of de Morbiere's wish to prove Albert to be the person who attempted his father's life, mentioning at the same time his persuasion that he himself was the author of the deed, and the only person chiefly concerned in it. He frankly owned that he thought the blow aimed at Albert de la Lance, and that his father had been mistaken for him; but assured Isabel that the life of her lover was safe, and beyond the reach of an assassin.

Isabel was deeply affected and weeped bitterly; she trembled for Albert's safety, and could not possibly divest herself of the fears which preyed upon her mind, and which she trembled to think of. Robert did all he could to console her, and so far succeeded as to impress her with a hope that he would keep out

of the way of his enemies, and evade their mercenary pursuits.

Finding that his unfortunate sister was again sinking beneath the weight of her sorrows, Robert endeavoured to turn off her attention by telling her of the change that was taking place in the castle.

" All our guests," said he, " are leaving us and flying off in all directions. They have been sadly disappointed, for they came expecting to be entertained with feasts and pleasures, and have seen nothing but spleen and sorrow."

" I feel how much I am to blame for it," replied Isabel, " but the fault is not so much mine as of those to whom I am indebted for keeping my bed."

" You are not to blame, love," said Robert, taking her hand, and pressing it with both his, " our parents are to be thanked for it, and their conduct has been noticed by every guest in the castle. I am sorry for them, I own, but they have laid themselves open to censure and must submit to opinions which I assure you are not at all in their favour."

As Robert finished speaking, the Duchess de Briançon entered the room, and getting between him and her daughter, she placed her arms round them, and said in the affectionate manner for which she was so much loved by her children, " Hé bien mes enfans, que dites vous ?"

The lovers in their momentary confusion looked at each other, and blushed ; but the words were delight to them, and, as if by one consent, they took the hands that hung about them and held them whilst the Duchess looked and seemed melting with tenderness for the gratitude which their eyes betrayed.

Isabel smiled, and invoked the blessings of heaven upon them, but a moment after, big tears rolled down her pale cheeks, and her utmost efforts could not repress the fulness of a heart, almost bursting with misery.

The Duchess never could bear the sight of tears, she seldom saw them from her own children and could not endure to behold the sorrows of others without becoming equally

affected and mingling tears of sympathy with those of woe. She rushed from her daughter to Isabel and folding her in her arms hid her face on her bosom and sobbed aloud. The picture was truly distressing and baffles all description, for never were persons more devoted to each other, and never was there an object so deserving of pity as the lovely and hapless Isabel.

"I am a silly old woman," said the Duchess, endeavouring to recover herself; "surely I shall never cease to be a child."

"You do not disguise the feelings of your heart," said Robert; "you cannot bear to see a friend in sorrow."

"The older I get, the weaker I become," said the Duchess; "I would give the world to see my lovely Isabel happy. Tell me, child, what can I do to serve you?"

"Nothing, I fear," said Isabel.

"Nothing?" replied the alarmed Duchess.— "No, nothing," said Isabel: "I am doomed to misery and have no hope of happier times.'

"Do not be melancholy," said the Duchess,

tenderly; "I see things in a different light, and have no doubt of your being soon happier."

"Not on this side the grave," said Isabel, looking up to heaven.

"Yes, yes, on this side the grave, a good and happy wife." As she spoke these words, the Duchess wiped off the tears that ran down her cheeks.

"Do not flatter me with vain hopes, dear Duchess," said Isabel, holding out her hand to her; "I have very little strength left, and that is not equal to bear me up against the malice of my enemies, the tyranny of my parents, and the pangs of a broken heart."

"Cheer up, Isabel," said the Duchess; "God will be merciful to you, and reward you for your resignation."

"May God *be* merciful to me," exclaimed Isabel, "and receive my departing soul into heaven. I am sinking into the grave, my kind friend, and I would die in peace if I could once more, only once, fold my poor Albert in these feeble arms. Pray for me, Duchess, and you,

my brother and *sister*, and when your poor Isabel is no more, prove her your affection by your love for my unfortunate Albert."

"You must not give way to such melancholy ideas," said the Duchess; "I am firmly persuaded things will turn out better than you expect. Consider, my dear girl, you are young, and may live until I am forgotten."

"You will really make me as bad as you are, Isabel," said Robert; "let yourself be consoled, and be assured that there is much truth in what the Duchess says."

"I hope so," replied Susan; "but I doubt."

"My father cannot always hold out," said Robert; "there is a time for all things, and he has been long enough in his present mood to turn to another."

"I wish your parents resembled my mother," said Susan; "you would not have much cause for sorrow."

"I am aware of that," said Isabel; "but as they do not choose to be kind to me, what can I do?"

"What, indeed; it is a painful question to ask,

and a difficult one to answer." The Duchess saw that Isabel was exhausted by her exertions, and refrained from adding any thing which might require an answer from her; she therefore recommended her not speaking, until sufficiently recruited. The Duchess perceived that she wished to speak, and in order to avoid it, she made some trifling apology for leaving her so soon, and took Robert away with her, leaving Susan to attend her friend, with a desire that they would not converse.

Margaret seldom left her mistress's room, and seemed desirous of no greater happiness than to attend upon her. She sometimes ventured to mention the jester's name, but never neglected her service for the pleasure of meeting him, which prevented her having seen him for several days.

Dominick knew of her affection for Baba, and had no objection to the match, forasmuch that he considered him as a *gentleman*, and a man of good principles. As for fortune, he was aware that servants could not save much, and

deemed it sufficient if by the labour of their hands they could manage to live in good service, and render themselves valuable to their masters.

On the score of consent, therefore, Margaret had no anxiety, and was grieved by no other circumstance relating to her lover, than the idea that the Marquis would probably leave the castle upon a bad understanding, and that Baba would accompany him. Such an event would at once destroy her dearest hopes. Her mind was made up, however, and she determined rather to forego the happiness of being his wife, than the service of a mistress who had by her kindness endeared herself almost to adoration.

It generally happens when a female is received as the bosom friend of another, that the confidential maid becomes jealous of her, and tries by a thousand little arts to undervalue her merits to her mistress, and to detect such inconsistencies as may tend to lessen her opinion of her; thinking to rise in favour as the

other falls. These petty manœuvres may, probably, in some instances arise from real affection, and from the jealousy which every true friend feels when fearful of losing the esteem of those they love; and in such cases it may be pardonable: but Margaret was free from these feelings, and saw the increasing attachment of Susan and Isabel with unaffected joy, delighted that she should have selected the lovely girl for the friend of her heart, and feeling no concern save a corresponding anxiety to render herself dear to Susan as she was to her mistress.

It must be owned that few girls in her situation of life resembled Margaret; but Isabel had taken extraordinary pains with her education, and although in our more enlightened days she would have appeared to possess but middling accomplishments, for the remote age of which we are speaking she was particularly well informed. Isabel enjoyed teaching her young *protegée* as she would her own sister, and had by degrees engrafted into her youth-

ful mind not only the ordinary course of female education, but also the ornamental parts of it.

Baba prided himself upon Margaret's learning; and, possessing as he did superior information, with great natural ability, he promised himself, not without reason, to find in her sentiments worthy of a wife, and accomplishments calculated to make her an agreeable companion.

This description of Margaret must not convey to the reader's mind an idea that she was too well educated for the wife of a man walking in the humbler paths of life, for it was not the case, but she was what every girl in her situation should be, not above it, although a great ornament to it, and not too fine a lady to be ready at all times to fulfil the duties of her servitude with readiness and satisfaction; although if transferred to a drawing-room, she would not have remained unnoticed either for the comeliness of her person, the sentiments of her heart, or the cultivation of her mind.

It must also be recollected that her situation

was not that of a menial servant, for it was more that of a companion than even of a lady's maid; yet so unassuming was she, and so accustomed to make herself generally useful, that she was ever willing to do any thing required of her, and would often assist in services below her bounden ones, when she thought to contribute to the comfort of her mistress, or ease the labours of a fellow creature.

That these praiseworthy feelings should have found their way into Margaret's youthful heart, they must of necessity have existed in the amiable being who instilled them, and to whom she was indebted for every thing. Dominick looked upon his daughter with indescribable delight, and considered her judgment so good, that in the course of his little affairs, and in cases of difficulty, she was his advocate, and what she decided was done, without fear of failure, and without opposition.

Margaret was aware of the education Baba had received from the old Abbot, and it was by the display of it that he first made an impression upon her heart. His talents ensured

him the means of providing creditably for a family, and she was desirous that he should employ them in a more honourable manner than by fulfilling the situation of jester to the Marquis de Morbiere, whose service was no recommendation to any man, and whose reputation rather reflected a questionable light upon those who were at all connected with him.

It is odd that until the affair of the tournament no one should have made it his business to pry into the Marquis's character, and find out what had since been reported of him. His evil genius seemed to have lingered behind a cloud which required some extraordinary event to dispel it; but when it appeared in all its natural deformity, and showed him in his own detestable shape, divested of his long boasted courage, and of the honourable feelings to which he had not the remotest claim, every one shunned him, and the castle of Barsas was losing its disappointed inmates, because they would not associate with a man from whom they had witnessed an act of unpardonable baseness, and at whose door a deadly crime was laid.

Margaret felt the force of all this, and trusted too much to the honour of the jester, to suppose him capable of conniving in the smallest degree, or of assisting in the most distant manner his worthless master in the perpetration of his offences. She therefore waited with patience the time when he could leave his service, and seek some new course of life, better calculated to ensure his respectability, and their mutual happiness.

In former days, servants of every description generally lived and died in the same service. They rose to the different offices in regular succession, until there were no more vacancies, and then death put a period to promotion. The difficulty of getting into another situation was consequently great, and Margaret often thought of it; but she depended upon the affection of her young mistress, and hoped to interest her so warmly on Baba's behalf, that she would exert herself to overcome the difficulty, and obtain for him, through the medium of her friends, a less discreditable service, and, perhaps, as lucrative a one. About emolu-

ment she had few cares, for in the country, when provided with food and lodging, little would defray the expenses of the other necessaries of life. "Was Albert de la Lance but a rich man," said she to herself, "how happy we should be to serve him and my kind mistress to the last day of our lives; and, as it is, if they were but married, why should we not be taken into their service?" Such thoughts consoled the poor girl, and she indulged a hope of seeing them realized: little, alas! did she think of the misery to come, and that she was on the eve of being, with so good a mistress, torn from her friends, by the lawless hands of a bloody banditti, and dragged to a distant castle, where guilt was the only deity adored, and which had long been devoted to the profanation of every civil and religious right.

CHAPTER V.

At the castle of Montfort, every thing continued at peace; the inmates were happy and contented, and comfort reigned throughout every department of the noble edifice, at the head of which Maurice Adellien displayed the soundness of his morals, and the unostentatious integrity of his character. This little aristocracy flourished with continued prosperity: no party factions divided opinions, or created any hostile feeling; no petty intrigues bred hatred and malice; and no unjust preference sowed the seed of jealousy, from which so many evils originate, and which is the bane of social happiness in every stage of life.

The prudence of this worthy man had, in his younger days, endeared him to the Count and Countess de Montfort, who looked upon him as a friend, nay even as a brother, and trusted him with the management of their

whole property, which, being extremely large, needed a clear head to conduct, and great honesty not to involve.

It had been his study so to regulate the affairs of his patrons, that he could at a moment's notice give an account of his stewardship; for his books were clear, the expenditure never exceeded the receipts, and the estates were free from debt. For this reason the domains of Montfort flourished in uninterrupted affluence, and the vassals who rented estates upon them were in easy circumstances, and free from the burthensome demands which the negligence of other stewards obliged them to make on behalf of their lords, or to supply the deficiencies which their own profligacy created in their coffers.

Maurice ever made it a rule to present his accounts for his master's inspection; and although the custom was unsolicited, it was nevertheless gratifying to both parties, as it showed the continuance of prosperity on one side, and gave the steward an opportunity to prove his honesty on the other.

Contented with his situation, and having neither wife nor child for whom there could be an inducement to lay up a store, Adellien made no effort to enrich himself, and when the Count inquired into his circumstances, previous to his departure for holy land, he found that after many years' servitude he had only amassed the little which remained unspent of his annual salary, and the occasional donations with which his generous master testified his approbation of his conduct.

At the death of the Countess, Maurice was left the whole management of the interior, as well as the exterior economy of the castle, and her various benevolent legacies were paid by him with a punctuality that commanded the admiration of every one, and the gratitude of those to whom the sums were remitted, in the distribution of which he observed the greatest delicacy. His conduct so endeared him to the Count, that he left him, as has already been said, the sole guardianship of his infant son; pointing out but a few particulars respecting some favorite branches of educa-

tion, and leaving every thing else to his judgment.

Adellien loved the child as his own, and displayed in his care of him the fond solicitude of an affectionate parent; he wished no greater happiness than to serve him as he had done his father, content to die the humble steward, if he could in that capacity promote his wealth and felicity. But events were differently ordained, and the faithfulness of his passed days was rewarded by the princely fortune which he now commanded, and only enjoyed when used to the advantage of his fellow creatures.

No domain in France presented so much content and affluence as the domain of Montfort.

It was by far the most extensive in the province, and yet there was not one dissatisfied individual upon it.

The goodness of his management, which had originally put affairs upon this footing, enabled him to prevent their falling into disregard, and the care which he constantly took of every thing relative to them, kept up the order which prevailed throughout every department of the domain, and maintained, without interruption,

the excellent state which it boasted over all the neighbouring counties.

Since the murder of Philip de Montfort, Maurice Adellien became, by virtue of the young Count's will, the sole proprietor and lord of the vast possessions which now paid him homage, and his daily occupation was to direct such improvements as his flourishing finances allowed, not only about the castle, but also in the grounds.

Every spot that had been the favorite object of the late Count and Countess's particular care, was cultivated and adorned in the most enchanting manner; for Maurice delighted in these testimonies of gratitude, and in keeping up among all classes of his dependants, the remembrance of their late masters, and the respect which he himself felt for their memories.

The spirit of the ill-fated Philip de Montfort still haunted the castle precincts, and the people who at first hurried with terror from the place, now waited to see it, and being persuaded of its inoffensiveness, they paid it a kind of worship, which proved the sincerity of their allegiance. Every evening some of the vassals

of either sex brought some trifling presents as offerings to the spirit, and although they remained for a day or two without being taken away by their owners, they were never touched by any one, and the spectre glided among them, without discomposing the order in which they were left.

All the prosperity which was enjoyed under the mild government of Maurice Adellien, was attributed to the influence of the spirit of the young Count; and to the same cause the whole of the vassals believed they owed the comforts they boasted.

Reverence succeeded fear, and gratitude paid its willing tribute for protection and happiness. The spectre was the only visible remains of the regretted family of Montfort, and as they saw it haunted the place for no ill purpose,—that their fruits ripened, that their wines did not turn sour, and that their cows were not dried by its influence,—they began to renew their intercourse and their visitings, although they did not yet venture to resume the pastimes in which they had so long delighted.

Almost every family had by this time copied Pascal's account of the cavern, and it was said that the spirit was sometimes seen riding into the dread place upon a milk-white charger; that the noble animal was a spirit, likewise, that its nostrils flashed fire, and that its eyes shone like stars.

Early on the morning after the Count de Barsas received his wound, the wood-cutter came to the castle of Montfort, and begged permission to speak a word to Maurice Adellien. He was readily admitted, being known to every one on account of his oddity and insatiable thirst of conversation.

"What news, my friend?" said Maurice, as the wood-cutter entered his cabinet.

"Bless you, Sir," said the man, unceremoniously betaking himself to a seat; "there has been more news within the last fortnight, than we have had since the death of your old Count."

"Indeed!" said Adellien, wiping a tear from his eye, which never failed to be produced by the mention of the beloved name.

"Has any thing extraordinary happened of late?"

"Happened!" exclaimed the astonished man, "what, have you not marked the times?"

"I am a bad hand that way," said Maurice.

"I am not," said the wood-cutter; "I told an ugly looking fellow yesterday that the birds of prey were about. Goodness me, how the wolves did howl; I quite shivered and shook again, and my leathern jacket stuck to my back like so much drifted snow. Bless us, Sir, there was that same night (last night, you know, Sir) such a horrible deed done, that when I heard of it I was as much affected as when I first heard of the Castle spectre; peace to its soul!"

"And what was it?" asked Maurice.

"Please to hear me out, Sir," interrupted the wood-cutter: "I was working for my bread, as all poor folk do, you know, Sir, when a tall, surly looking, black-eyed man approached me, wrapped up in a wide cloak (which, in my opinion, covered implements of assassination,

I beg pardon for the suspicion), and spoke as if he had a right to command. He asked me about the spectre (peace be to it!) and would have me tell him all I know about it; but, Sir, he seemed to know the story better than myself; and, when I bade him walk on, he did abuse me, and call me such names, that I quite trembled every limb of me, for fear of my life, for he looked as if he would have killed me, and felt for something under his cloak, which I could not help thinking was a dagger. Lord, Sir, we never knew the like before in these parts, and if such things come to pass, a plague may as well take us, and we may as well give our babes for food to the wolves."

"Well, my friend," said Adellien, wishing to hear what the man had to say.

"Well, Sir," continued the wood-cutter; "I made bold to tell the fellow he was about for no good, and when he turned from me, I looked up, and behold, the clouds looked angry, and doubled, as if intent upon returning from whence they came: the birds of prey were furious upon the wing, and the wolves prowled

about, snuffing at the wind, as if they smelt blood. When I went home, I told my old woman of what I had seen, and she agreed that such signs were never noticed unless some evil was at hand. And sure enough, Sir, for this very morning we were told that the Count de Barsas was wounded last night by some unknown murderer. Mark the times, Sir; mischief comes upon mischief, blood flows after blood, and death comes so fast after death, that when we go to bed it is a chance whether we shall not be murdered before day-break."

"Surely it must have been some accident," said Maurice; "no one could ever have made an attempt upon the life of the Count de Barsas."

"It was no accident," said the wood-cutter; "but some say it was a mistake."

"How so?" said Maurice.

"Why, Sir," replied the other, "'tis said the jagged bolt which was shot into the Count's thigh, was intended for Albert de la Lance; and that it was meant to break off all communication with the young lady."

"Indeed!" said Adellien; "and who do they accuse of the attempt?"

"There is, as I can find, but one opinion about that," answered the man; "and the Marquis de Morbiere is said to be the assassin."

"Impossible, my good fellow," said Maurice; "it can never be: his rank and fortune render it impossible."

"Not so impossible as you think, Sir," resumed the wood-cutter; "there are other things said of him not a jot more to his credit. They say he keeps some men in pay who murder any for him, if he gives them their price. It is even said the Marquis de Morbiere got young Count Philip murdered.

"I have heard that story before," said Maurice; "but who can prove it? Could a proof be brought home to him, I would undertake to elucidate the matter."

"There is proof enough," exclaimed the wood-cutter; "his own jester told me just now, that when he was in his master's room last night, the spirit of the poor young Count appeared in the chamber, and that it

was the second time it had haunted him since his stay at the castle."

"The jester might have been joking with you," said Maurice; "but if the story was true, it would go a great way towards throwing suspicion upon the Marquis, for I have not heard of any other such visit from my poor master's spirit."

"Nor I, Sir," said the wood-cutter: "it is harmless as a child; but when so provoked, we cannot wonder at any thing. Baba told me the story, and assured me upon his life that it was true, and moreover said, that he and his master lay upon the floor, more dead than alive, and that when he came to his senses again (which he did before the Marquis), the angry ghost had disappeared."

"This is a terrible story," said Maurice, "and I would like to hear any further account you may be able to collect. What has become of Albert de la Lance? is he not a tenant of the Count's?"

"Yes," replied the wood-cutter, "and a most worthy tenant too; but poor dear gentle-

man, he is like other folk, not overburdened with property, and for that they don't care what becomes of him. I dare say if he was to be killed, no one would ask a question about him. The poor people say you and he are the best creatures in the country, and (God be with you both!) I think so too; for there is not a kind thing but what he does, whenever he has an opportunity. Lord bless me, Sir, they are always such people that suffer most."

"It often happens so, my honest fellow," interrupted Maurice, "and I am glad to hear your account of him. He has indeed been ill-used, if they have treated him as it is said."

"Every thing I have uttered is true, I warrant you, Sir," said the wood-cutter, "and mark my words; this Albert will be hard driven and persecuted, but he'll get the better of his enemies, and will be the sending of them straight to the devil; for, Lord bless my soul, they seem bent upon murder, and will kill him if they can. Poor gentleman, he has no chance hereabouts; I wish he would think

better of his love, and go back to his own country."

"Where does he come from?" said Maurice.

"I have been asked the question five score times, Sir," replied the wood-cutter, "but I know nothing of the matter, for (as other people say, Sir), nobody knows where he comes from, and it does not make much odds; he's a rare honest man; that I can say for him."

"I am glad to hear it," said Adellien, wishing to bring the conversation to a conclusion. "And I hope they may soon cease to persecute him."

"We shall have a change, Sir," exclaimed the rustic prophet. "I have watched the times, they speak no good, no—not they. Evil, Sir, is at hand, and the signs are visible to any body who chooses to mark them."

"I am sorry you think so," said Maurice Adellien; "we have had misfortunes enough without adding to the number of them. I hope you may find yourself wrong, my good friend, and that events may turn out better than you.

think. What further particulars did you hear about the spectre?"

"None but the description of it given me by the Marquis de Morbiere's jester," replied the wood-cutter.

"And what did he say of it?" asked Maurice.

"Lord, Sir," said the man, "I am almost afraid to tell you, for when he described to me, I thought I must have fainted; I never was so terrified. Bless me, Sir; what times we live in! Well, Sir, when Mr. Baba was going out of his master's room, the spectre stood before him; it was covered with bright armour, which looked like fine polished steel, but it was so dazzling that mortal man could no more look upon it, than upon the noon sun. Its eyes were of pure fire, and flashed like lightning, so that it lighted every thing in the room, and made the candles look dim and ashamed of their glimmer. Mr. Baba tells me, Sir, that its eyes looked as if a mighty furnace was burning within his beaver. The feathers upon its helmet were as white as snow, and seemed

alive, for they shook and turned so angrily, that the jester says they moved like serpents in a passion. In the spectre's hand was grasped a battle-axe, which shone like its armour, and so dreadful was its appearance altogether, that poor Mr. Baba fell quite dead-like upon the floor, and did not recover for God only knows how long."

"By your account, he must have been very much frightened," said Maurice; "and I do not wonder at it. We often see the restless spirit of my dear master about here, but it seems quite at peace with us, and we rather like to see it than not. At first, as you know, people were so frightened that they would not come near the castle at night, but now their fears have subsided, and they come freely, although even now they sometimes beg to sleep in the castle, rather than go out late at night, as the place the spirit mostly haunts lies close to the road side."

"Where does it go to?" said the affrighted wood-cutter.

"No one knows," replied Maurice; "it has

often been seen to retire into the cavern of death, where no living creature will dare venture. Many have tried, but none have succeeded."

"Have you read the book of that holy man (peace be to him!) the reverend priest of this castle, Erasmus Jacob Polycarp Pascal?" said the wood-cutter, crossing himself several times from his forehead to his chin.

"I have," said Maurice; "and think it a very extraordinary document."

"Bless my soul, Sir," exclaimed the man, "I see nothing extraordinary in it; I think it is the most natural thing in the world, and, depend on't, that the saintly man who wrote it knew what would happen at this time."

"Well, well, my honest fellow," said Maurice, who wished to rid himself of his talkative visitor, "I dare say you are right, and shall be glad to see you another time, when you have more news to communicate."

"I beg pardon, Sir, for being so troublesome," said the wood-cutter; "mark the times, Sir, and tell me when we meet again whether

seeing birds of prey, hearing the hungry wolves, seeing ugly-faced marauders, ghosts, imprisonments, murders, violence, and oppressions, are not signs of evil to come. Mark me, Sir, before we part; I am but a poor wood-cutter at the best, never mind that, my words are true, I warrant you, and will come to pass. Good day, Sir, I will get what news I can for you."

So saying the wood-cutter departed, leaving Maurice Adellien not a little pleased at being alone again, for the poor fellow's prophecies had little effect upon him, and he thought the evils of past times were enough, without anticipating a recurrence of the bloody scenes which had marked them, and which he sincerely hoped would never be repeated.

By dint of prophecying, the wood-cutter had become a man of considerable importance among the lower classes of vassals on the two domains. He was looked upon as being some what inspired, for it had happened that two or three, out of his inexhaustible stock of prophecies, had actually come to pass, and they

were sufficient to seal his reputation, and to constitute him a man of reference in all public and domestic affairs, which, by their nature, could not be immediately settled. In such cases they called upon the prophet, and whatever opinion he gave was abided by, and the parties waited patiently the eventful time when the truth of it would be seen. He gave his advice gratis, and would on no occasion receive the least acknowledgments; his leisure hours were, therefore, considerably engaged by numerous applicants; and in process of time it became the fashion for young girls to get him to tell them their destinies as housewives, before they chose to be married to their lovers. In the same way the jealous youths inquired whether the cherished objects would be faithful to them, and readily gave ear to the forester, who seldom disturbed the peace of their bosoms by doubts, as he gave himself little trouble upon any but subjects of general interest.

The stern solemnity of his physiognomy probably founded his reputation; and his curiosity

got him sufficient information to set up a stock of news, which was refreshed by daily supplies from sundry gossips, who never came to his cottage without a story. Gifted with an inventive genius, a great deal of vanity, and a tolerable share of assurance, tales never lost for want of embellishment, and the wood-cutter made it a rule never to repeat what he was told, without adding so much of his own as would make the story palatable to his friends.

From the castle of Montfort, he paid, on his way home, a number of visits to his neighbours, and told them every thing concerning the ghost, the Marquis de Morbiere, Albert de la Lance, the Count de Barsas, Isabel, and the jester. His story was soon repeated, and in the course of the day it was known considerably beyond the boundaries of the domains immediately connected with it.

In consequence of this one man's industry the Marquis de Morbiere became every where suspected, and the misfortunes of Albert de la Lance decided a thousand young champions in his favour, who were already warmly inte-

rested by his exploits at the tournament. Isabel, who had always been a favourite, was now the object of popular enthusiasm, and the idea of an alliance with the Marquis de Morbiere was considered as madness in her parents, and was contemplated with horror, since the attempt which had been made to murder her lover. The wood-cutter had taken good care that no mistake should arise about the intention, and had without ceremony represented it as an accident happened to the Count de Barsas, in an attempt of the Marquis de Morbiere to murder the hero of the tilt. The likelihood of the story got it immediate credence, and it was buzzed about, not only in every part of the domains, but also within the castle of Barsas, where it engrossed the minds of every one.

By means of the Marquis de Morbiere's numerous domestics, who were staying within at the castle, the report concerning him was not many hours finding its way to him. Although he seemed to treat what was said with contempt, the various changes which his coun-

tenance underwent, the quivering of his lips, the rolling of his eyes, and the flush of his cheeks, told as plainly as words could tell that he was guilty. The impression was received by the servants, who thought to render him a service by giving him an opportunity to vindicate himself, but when they perceived that his looks betrayed him, they murmured within themselves, and would have exposed him to the just hatred of the world, had they not been restrained by the remembrance of their dependant situation, of his power over them, and of the risks they would run by their indiscretion. Fearful of each other, they uttered not a word, and this timid but prudent policy checked in some degree the torrent of accusing opinions which were directed against him.

Baba, whose suspicions amounted to absolute conviction of his master's guilt, was more circumspect than all. Beside what he had in the heat of the first moment said to the wood-cutter, he kept his thoughts to himself, and attended his master's dressing, as usual, without

mentioning more concerning the spectre than went to describe his fears, and his hatred for a haunted castle. He so artfully played off his deceptions, that the Marquis dismissed the idea of being suspected by him, and determined to bind him more firmly than ever to his service and interests, knowing how much the jester had him in his power. In earnest of these intentions he gave him a well-filled purse, told him how sorry he was for the fright he had experienced, and assured him that he would ask the Duchess to change his room.—Baba saw through the manœuvre, but, like a prudent man, pocketted the money, and made him a low theatrical bow, exclaiming with forced hilarity, "Thanks, great Sir, all's fish that comes to my net!"

That the present should carry no responsibility with it, the jester hastened to finish his task, and left the room without allowing the Marquis time to bind him to secrecy, or to require any service which he might be reluctant to perform.

CHAPTER VI.

At the time agreed upon, Carl, with a band of hired ruffians, who had long been his companions in iniquity, took up their position in the dark place where the Marquis de Morbiere had promised to meet them.

Fortmain was also secured for the expedition, but Carl did not think it safe to employ him within the castle, and directed him to be in readiness with half a dozen others, under Isabel's window. They accordingly betook themselves of one of the Count's barges, and waited as directed, without knowing more than that they were to receive into it whatever would be let down to them.

Fortmain guessed what the burden would be which they were stationed to receive, but resistance was vain, and would only tend to deprive Isabel of the assistance which it might

afterwards be in his power to afford her. Carl had told him at an early hour in the day that he particularly wished to see him in the evening, and having concealed until their second meeting the cause of it, he was not able to put Albert de la Lance on the alert, or to attempt a rescue.

No one, with the exception of Fortmain, had an idea that they were hired to carry off Isabel; nor could he himself suppose that two persons were to share the same fate. Carl took his employer at his word, and having been promised Margaret as a reward for the seizure of her mistress, he formed the bold plan of making a double capture, and had provided himself with the necessary means to secure them.

The Marquis de Morbiere was punctual to his time, and came down, as he had done the night before, wrapped up in a large cloak, and covered with a broad hat. He was unarmed, with the exception of a dagger which he generally carried about him, and had no intention to act in the tragedy which was going to be performed.

When he approached, Carl whispered, " All's ready, master."

" Is it, Carl," said Morbiere; " Have you got every thing you want?"

" Every thing," answered Carl; " and this band of sturdy fellows to boot; we'll manage it, I warrant you."

" Do you think so?" said the Marquis.

" Think so!" exclaimed Carl, in a louder tone; " curse me if I don't think we could let the whole castle out of the window, with these fine fellows. Look at 'em, Master; why you're not faint-hearted, are you?"

" No, not I, Carl," said the Marquis; " the devil a bolder heart than I've got do you need. Tell me your plans."

" Come away a little, and I will," said Carl, drawing the Marquis a few paces from the group; " we are going into the castle, and intend letting your girl and mine down from the window, into a boat which is in waiting. When we get them into it, the boat is to push off to the other side of the water, where I have got

a lot of good horses in waiting, which will carry us all to your castle before day-break."

"And pray tell me, Carl," said the Marquis, in a stern tone of voice; "who authorized you to hire these men to carry off the maid; could you not have patience until another time?"

"Your humble servant," said Carl, in the same strain as his employer; "you're to have your way, and we are to have patience! a likely story, indeed. Now I'll tell you what, sir; if you don't like the bargain, you may be off of it, and please yourself with some one else. For my part, I mean to have my girl, and you may help yourself to yours, if you please; but this much I'll tell you again, that I won't help you."

"I did not mean to affront you, Carl," said the Marquis in a gentler tone; "never mind, you shall have your girl, if you like; you have my consent."

"Damn your consent," vociferated the angry ruffian; "do you think I care for it? I don't

want it, that's more; so you may just take yourself in again, and not come bothering here."

"Come, come, my honest fellow," said the Marquis, attempting to soothe him; "let us make it up; you know I meant nothing by what I said; it was all a joke."

"You take me for a fool, do you?" said Carl; "I'm no fool, master, nor am I an honest man, any more than yourself. We both deserve to be hanged, and if one is a greater rascal than the other, it is you."

"Thank you, Carl," said the Marquis, forcing a laugh; "you are in one of your funny humours, my boy; I would give a barrel of wine to see you so at any time."

"Would you?" said Carl, relaxing a little.

"I would upon my honour," said the Marquis.

"Your honour?" repeated Carl; "your honour?—Pray when did you hear from it last?"

"Never mind," said the Marquis; "you shall have the girl and the wine if you do your duty well."

"I've half a mind not to stir," said Carl.

"Come, that's a good fellow," said the Marquis, as he put out his hand to Carl; "you must finish this business for me."

"Well then, I will," said Carl, surlily; "but what do you mean to do?"

"I mean to go in again," said the Marquis; "and leave you to the management of the business; I will set out from here to-morrow morning, and be at my castle in the evening."

"Very well," said Carl; "but you must give me some money; I have none to go on with."

The Marquis gave him his purse. "That will do," said Carl; "now you may go in."

"Very well," said Morbiere; "mind you are successful. You know where to put the girl when you get her home?"

"I know what to do with her," said Carl; "you may leave it all to me, or do it all yourself."

"I leave it *all* to you," said the Marquis. "Be quiet, and take care of yourselves. Is Formain in your troop?"

"He's with the others under the castle wall," said Carl.

" That's well," said the Marquis. He then gave a few directions concerning what he wished done during his absence, and took leave of Carl to return to his apartment.

When Carl conceived his master had reached his room, he left his associates to take a survey of the interior of the castle, that he should not be surprised, and detected.

He soon returned, and began instructing them of the nature of the expedition upon which they were going, promising them handsome rewards in case of success, and the punishment of death to the first who should occasion a failure. Having all agreed to the terms, they sallied forth, as detestable a band of desperate ruffians as ever was seen, and completely armed and prepared for every crime.

Carl led the way, and was followed by the rest. When arrived at the outer door of Isabel's apartment, a difficulty arose which they had not thought of; it was, how to gain admittance. He considered a moment, and determined upon his expedient.

He knocked at the door; a few seconds

elapsed without receiving any answer. He knocked again, and soon after Dominick asked, who was there.

"'Tis I," said Carl, trying to imitate the jester's voice.

"Who?" said Dominick.

"It is I, Baba;" answered Carl.

"I'm undressed," said Dominick; "tell me what you want."

"I want to tell you something about the Count," said the artful wretch. "He is very bad."

Dominick opened the door, and immediately the savage band rushed upon him, and stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth, to prevent his giving the alarm. They then tied his hands behind his back, tied his legs together, and fastened him down to his bed, leaving one man with him, who had orders to kill him if he stirred.

They next entered Isabel's bed-room, and here the scene was truly horrible. Awakened by the noise in Dominick's room, she sat up in her bed to listen; and Margaret fancying that

something had happened, jumped out of bed, and went to her mistress's assistance. She was standing by her in her night dress, when Carl and the others entered the room.

Isabel's nerves were unable to bear the dreadful sight, she sunk back in a swoon, and her poor maid clung to her that she should not be torn from her.

"Don't be frightened, my pretty maid," said Carl; attempting to pull her from her grasp.

"Wretch," cried she in agony; "what do you want here?"

"Never mind what we want, and hold your tongue," said Carl: "we will tell you more about it to-morrow. Bring the cords here."

"Father, Father, help us," she cried.

"Hold your tongue, love," said Carl; "keep this in your mouth a bit, it will stop your ranting." At the same time he pushed a napkin into her mouth, and tied a blanket round her, so as to prevent the possibility of resistance.

After this act of violence, Carl directed his associates to take the dresses which were in

the room, and began muffling up the unfortunate Isabel in her bed-clothes. They then put her into a strong canvass bag prepared for the purpose, and having fastened a large rope to it, they carried her to the window; threw it open, and let her gradually down into the boat.

The moment it had reached the bottom, Carl called out to those below, to send the bag up again, and Fortmain finding his suspicions to be but too well founded, opened it, and with the help of his companions took out the lovely victim.

The men in the room above drew up the bag, put Margaret into it, and let her down in the same manner as they did her mistress. When the bag was drawn up again, they let down Carl, then another, a third, and so on until the number was reduced to two, who made knots in the rope about two feet asunder, to a sufficient length to reach the boat; they then drew Isabel's bed to the window, put the rope round it, threw the remainder to Carl, and let themselves down.

When they had all safely reached the bottom, the knotted end of the rope was pulled down, the remainder of course following; the boat was pushed off, and soon rowed to the other side.

During all this time, Fortmain had employed himself in wrapping up the unfortunate females, and particularly Isabel, whose situation brought big tears from his eyes; but he felt that this was not the time for grief, other duties called his attention.

By Fortmain's advice, Margaret was unbound, and warned at the same time, that if she made the least noise, she and her mistress would be that moment killed. Carl accompanied the assurance with a dreadful oath, which so intimidated her that she promised faithfully to be quiet.

Assisted by Fortmain, Margaret succeeded in bringing Isabel to life; but the moment she beheld the wretches about her, she relapsed into another swoon. Carl watched them with unremitting suspicion, and more than once attempted to kiss Margaret, who vowed, that if

he repeated the outrage, no fear of death would prevent her crying for help.

Margaret found among the dresses which were let down, several articles of considerable value to her mistress and herself in their present deplorable situation; such as warm clothing, cloaks and other things, of which she made immediate use; for, when she was untied, she remained in her night dress, and would have perished of cold, had she not slipped on some of the apparel.

In Isabel's state it would have been death to her, had an attempt been made to unmuffle her; Margaret therefore covered her head and bosom as warmly as possible, and directed her whole attention to restore her to her senses.

They had now reached the other side of the river, having been run down a considerable distance by the rapidity of the current; the river being much swollen, and considerably widened by the late rains.

Margaret trembled on beholding the complicated villany of her captors, and she was right in her persuasion, that the horses thus

prepared were intended to carry Isabel and herself to the castle of the bloody Morbiere. Resistance she knew was vain, and she gave herself up for lost; for she knew that such violence must have an unlawful object, and determined not to submit to see her beloved mistress disgraced by being married to him; for she never dreamed of greater outrage than such an alliance; her mind was too pure to harbour the thought.

Carl commanded Fortmain to mount one of the horses, which was accoutred with a kind of pillion placed before the saddle, for the purpose of carrying two persons. Having taken his seat, Isabel was placed before him, and safely tied; so that, assisted by him, there was no danger of her falling, even in her helpless situation.

Carl mounted another horse accoutred in the same manner, and had Margaret placed upon the pillion before him. The remainder of the men mounted their horses, and all being now arranged (the boat having previously been

made fast to a tree), they went off at a brisk canter, and soon got upon the highway, which enabled them to increase their speed, and secure themselves from the possibility of being traced, in case the alarm should have been given by Dominick, when left to himself.

The motion of the horse, and the freshness of the air soon revived Isabel, who only opened her eyes to be made fully sensible of her dreadful situation.

The moment Fortmain felt her move, and perceived signs of returning life, he endeavoured in the most persuasive accents to prevail upon her to make no resistance, and to trust to him for her safety.

"What is all this?" cried the agonised girl. "How do I come here? who brought me here? by whose order? answer me, I beseech you; if you are an honest man, answer me."

"I will, my dear mistress," said Fortmain; "but you must be composed."

"Mistress!" exclaimed Isabel; "who are you that dare call me so?"

" You know me by name, Madam," said Fortmain, spurring on his horse, for fear of being overheard.

" What is your name ?" said she.

" My name is Fortmain."

" Gracious heavens, is it possible!" said Isabel, almost choaked with tears. " Are you really Fortmain."

" I am indeed so called, Madam ; and am moreover honoured with the confidence of the best man in the world. I must mention no names."

" Save me, generous man, for the love of him, save me." She could utter no more.

" Weep not, Madam," said the honest fellow ; " my heart is breaking for you. In pity dry your tears, or I shall be unable to serve you."

" Where are you taking me to," said Isabel ?

" To the castle of Morbiere," he answered. " Start not so, Madam ; your safety depends upon your courage, and your reliance upon my honour."

"Did you assist in reducing me to this dreadful situation."

"I did, Madam," said he, firmly; "to save your honour and your life."

"Why do you take me to the Marquis's castle, and why did you not apprise Albert of my danger?"

"Your only chance of being saved, Madam, is by my assisting my villanous employer, for had I not done it, you would have been certain of a fate a thousand times worse than death. I will avert it for you, if I die in the attempt."

"I believe you," said Isabel; "yet how dreadful is my situation."

"It is indeed, dear lady," replied Fortmain; "and it would have been worse had I been able to inform my patron of it. But I could not at any rate, for I only knew when I was ordered into the boat that my services were wanted for this disgraceful expedition."

"What do you mean by the boat," said Isabel.

Fortmain gave the desired answer, and a

brief history of what had happened; told her that the Marquis was to follow next day, having thought to escape suspicion by staying at the castle. He then told her that Margaret was a prisoner with her; but that it would be the loss of them both if she appeared to know any of the particulars relating to her maid's or her own captivity. Isabel acknowledged the prudence of his warning, and promised to act upon his advice in every respect.

Having so far attained his object, Fortmain further represented the importance of Isabel's treating him, in the presence of any third person (excepting Margaret), with all the harshness in her power. For if the Marquis, Carl, or any of their spies, were to have the most remote suspicion of an understanding, it would be his instant death, and her inevitable ruin. Reluctant, therefore, as she was, to repay so much generosity with unkindness, she assured him of full compliance with his request, and aware that there was no alternative between

dishonour and excusable deception, she wisely chose the latter, as the only chance that remained of escaping from the hands of her murderous oppressor.

CHAPTER VII.

The sun was just rising above the horizon, when the cavalcade reached the castle of Morbiere. Carl commanded his men to halt, and alighting, opened a postern gate, with a key which he always kept in his pocket, and led his horse, upon which sat the affrighted Margaret, into a large paved court, having more the appearance of a wilderness, from the long grass which grew between the stones, than a place for the habitation of civilized beings. Carl helped his prisoner off the horse, and returned to the gate; he then ordered Fortmain to dismount, and conducted Isabel into the court in the same way as he had done her maid. The remainder of the cavalcade followed, each alighting in succession, and leading his harrassed steed after him. Carl then locked the gate, and returned to his captives.

When Isabel was taken off Fortmain's horse,

she was unable to stand, and Carl was compelled to let her sink down upon the pavement, where she laid more dead than alive.

This was the first opportunity she had of seeing all the wletchedness of her situation. She was surrounded by ruffians, upon whose faces she could plainly read the history of their lives: brought into a castle which bore the appearance of ruin and misery; left to the rough handle of disorderly brigands, whose ferocious talk had more than once reached her ears during the journey; and tortured with the idea of being reduced to this deplorable state, by the villany of the man who had so many times lived upon her father's hospitality, and had ventured a claim to her hand, in the character of a suitor.

Carl left our unhappy heroine but little time to think of her sorrows, before he added to their number.

"Well, Miss," he cried, with a sneer of contempt, "do you think you can walk?" He waited a moment for an answer. "What have you done with your tongue; can't you speak?

If you will neither walk nor answer, I suppose I must carry you." So saying, he caught her up, and bore her away; her body bending double over his arm, from illness and debility. She was sensible of what was done, but that was all, for she could not speak, and had hardly strength to look back for Margaret, who followed slowly after her.

"Come on, my pretty," said Carl, as he stopt an instant to seek her. "Come on, I say, or I shall have to carry you, as I do this piece of sickly lumber."

Isabel stretched out her hand towards her maid, and Margaret comprehending the request thus mutely expressed, exerted herself, and followed close after Carl. Fortmain laden with bundles followed likewise.

In this manner they proceeded through several uninhabited apartments, through passages, and many steps, until they came to an inner door, which Carl opened with a key which he drew from his vest. "Pass on," said he, to Margaret and Fortmain; when they had passed he locked the door, and walked on

to a second, at the end of the room. At this door he knocked several times with his foot, waiting a short interval between each attack. After a few minutes a woman's voice demanded, "Who's there?"

"'Tis I, old hag," answered Carl.

"Welcome, welcome," called the woman; and unfastened the door, through which Carl commanded Margaret and Fortmain to pass, and followed after them."

"What! come at last?" said a toothless, deformed woman about sixty years of age, who was the warden of this part of the castle, and who had given them admittance.

"Hold your prattle, old bone-sucker," said the impatient ruffian. "I'm tired of the wench; give me a chair for her." The woman handed a dusty old chair. "There," said he, setting down Isabel, "now *make yourself at home.*"

She shuddered as the words struck upon her ears, and would have said something, but Fortmain looked at her, and she was silent.

"Now, mother," said Carl to Barbara (the old woman was so called), "lead the way,

and show us the room you have prepared for this young lady."

"It is all ready, quite ready, quite nice and comfortable," said Barbara, leading the way out of the room, and followed by Carl, who had again taken Isabel into his arms, and by the other two.

The old woman conducted them through a long suit of apartments to a room of which she unlocked and unbolted the door. "Here we are," said she, "this is your room, my dear."

Carl placed his lovely burden upon a sofa, and bent over her, making an attempt to kiss her. Weak as Isabel was, she managed to avoid the insult, and as she pushed him off with one hand, she snatched away the dagger which he carried in his belt, and during the struggle succeeded in concealing it under her.

"You'll get the better of your airs, before you have been a week in the castle, I warrant you," said the unblushing wretch.

"Aye, aye, that the dear girl will," said the

old woman; "your master's a good hand at that kind of thing."

"We know a story or two about him; don't we, mother?"

"Lork yes, master Carl," replied the woman, "we arn't above green in these matters, the better luck."

"So say I, old devil," quoth Carl. "And as for this girl here," slapping Margaret upon the back, "she'll like the castle when she knows it better."

"Aye, aye, take my word for it," said Barbara; "they won't make such faces in another week. I wish I were young again."

"The devil doubt you, old bone-sucker," cried Carl; "see that the women have something to eat; you have your orders, and I desire you to see that this pretty wench wants nothing."

"What's the lady called?" asked Barbara.

"No questions, old scarecrow," exclaimed Carl; "she's mine, the other is master's, that's enough for you, an' curse you."

"Will you stay with them the while?" said the woman.

"No," replied the ruffian, turning to Fortmain, who had not spoken a word: "I must go with this workman of mine; you do what I bid you, and lock the door after you."

Carl made an attempt to kiss Margaret, but meeting with an indignant rebuff, he beckoned to Fortmain, who immediately followed him, and they both left the room. Barbara then pointed out several necessaries for the toilet and went about the task which Carl had set her.

This was the first time in Isabel's life, that she heard bolts drawn upon her, or the turn of a jailor's key; the sound made her shudder, and had it not been for the hope of Fortmain's relieving her from her imprisonment, she would probably have been unable to bear the weight of affliction which her dreadful situation occasioned her. It was, however, the greatest consolation to have her faithful Margaret with her, although she bitterly bemoaned the poor girl's troubles.

"You speak not to me, my dearest mistress," said the maid.

"Alas, my good Margaret; my heart is too full, I am too unhappy to speak. The wretch who has brought me to this will be the death of me."

"Do not think so, dear lady; he will send you back to the castle of Barsas, when he finds you will not listen to his proposals."

"You deceive yourself, Margaret; he has not put us into the hands of a despicable banditti to leave us a shadow of hope. We would have been better treated had his motives been in any way honourable; think how we have been used, Margaret; see the state to which we are reduced."

"'Tis very true, Madam; but what grieves me as much as any thing, is to see you in such an attire."

"Dreadful, Margaret, it is dreadful; and your own situation, my poor girl, is as mortifying as mine; but I have *one* consolation in all my misery, I can defend myself from insult and violence; look at this dagger!"

"Gracious heavens! Madam, how came you by that horrible weapon?"

"I drew it from the belt of the wretch who dared insult me just now."

"What! had you really the courage?"

"Yes, Margaret; and I feel confident that I shall dare *use* it, unless the ruffians keep their distance."

"But should he discover it in your possession, will he not be doubly ferocious?"

"He may indeed; but if he attempts to take it from me, he will find (ill as I am) his death at the point of it."

"I fear, Madam, you will not dare use it."

"You wrong me, Margaret; I can dare any thing to save my honour. I pray to God that I may not be put to the trial; but I should be unworthy to become the wife of Albert de la Lance, nay, unworthy of his love, if I could not overcome the natural timidity of my nature, to bury this dagger into the heart of the first man who shall not keep his proper distance."

"The holy Virgin be praised," exclaimed

Margaret; " may you be well enough to do it."

" I am at this moment sinking with illness," said Isabel; " but I can die but once, and if I am to expire before my time, it may as well be now as a year hence."

" If I had been able to secure such a prize as yours, Madam, I would have used it much before we arrived here, for the conduct of the man upon whose horse I sat, was one continued course of brutality."

" Poor Margaret," said her mistress, with a deep sigh.

" Was your horseman the same?" asked the anxious girl.

" No, Margaret, he was all kindness and respect."

" Do not joke at such a time, my dear mistress."

" I joke not, Margaret; I rode with Fortmain."

" Heavens! is it possible, Madam?"

" It is indeed," said Isabel; and she related

the whole of what had passed upon the road, and warned Margaret against betraying the generous man.

Margaret for a moment lost all thoughts of her melancholy situation, in the bright hope which the mention of Fortmain's name reflected into her bosom, and she felt confident that he would use every exertion to save her mistress, and carry her back to the Castle of Barsas, or to make known her captivity to Albert, to whose heroism she fancied a whole nation must yield, if attacked by him.

They next surveyed the apartment. It was a large room, looking over the court by which they had entered; it was wainscotted with oak, of which the colour was hardly visible from the thickness of the dust upon it. There being but one door, Isabel concluded it must be the last room upon that floor, and she was right, for it had been chosen on this and on former occasions, that the voice of the prisoner should not reach the inhabited part of the castle. This room was in the part of the building of which we have before spoken,

and which, from noises which were sometimes heard by the domestics nearest to it, was reported to be haunted, and was believed to be totally forsaken by human being. Had Isabel known as much, her fears would have been greatly increased, and she would probably have despaired of ever repassing the outer walls alive.

The old woman to whose care the Marquis de Morbiere had committed his prisoners, was a widow, whose husband had during some years filled the situation which had since his death been given to Carl, as the reward of his long services as understrapper to his predecessor. She was a most profligate character, and enjoyed above all things to see her sex disgraced by the baseness of the vilest of men. She had no feeling, no pity, no remorse, and no shame, and for these reasons had she originally been selected by her master.

The castle being of considerable magnitude, and this portion of it apparently cut off from all intercourse with the rest, Barbara's residence in it was unknown to every one, except

an old domestic who had been her companion in infamy, and who acted as messenger from the Marquis to her, and from her to him. He alone was acquainted with the secret passages which kept open a communication with the more inhabited part; and to him and Barbara was committed the care of female prisoners in the first stage of their captivity. When death and torture were inflicted, Carl was supreme officer, and fulfilled the duties of his situation with a zeal which proved how much he delighted in blood, and in aggravating the miseries of his fellow creatures, for he lost no opportunity of increasing their sufferings, and, on the contrary, strained his imagination to the utmost, to contrive some new means by which he could prolong the agonies of death.

To these scenes, whenever they occurred, the Marquis de Morbiere was a willing witness, and enjoyed the idea of proving his irresistible power, by tortures which were never exceeded, if ever equalled, in the dungeons of the Inquisition.

Happily for our heroine and for her maid,

they were ignorant of the extent of his infamy, although they knew he had been guilty of crimes of which the very remembrance impressed them with a tolerably just idea of the perils to which they were exposed.

There was but one bed in the room, but it was large, and Isabel consoled herself with the prospect of having Margaret to sleep with her, as she would be in some degree a protection, and in every respect a great comfort to her. To every thought of her heart, the faithful girl had access; Isabel had from her earliest years made her the depository of them, and now the knot was tightened by their both sharing the same fate, by both being exposed to the same perils, and glad to avail themselves of every opportunity to consult and condole with each other.

The prisoners had scarce had time to better the order of their dresses, when the huge bolts were again undrawn, and the key turned by Barbara, who made her appearance with breakfast. She cast a suspicious look about her as she entered, to see whether any effort had been made to escape, but finding that all was

as she had left it, she placed the board upon a table and addressed them thus:

"Well dears, I dare say your appetites are good by this time; a long ride by night and a snug breakfast at morn, agree very well. Upon my word, miss, you are better looking than I thought; no wonder our master chose to have you here; well, you will have him to night. Bless me, why should you colour up so? you won't mind an old woman like me, I warrant you: surely there's no harm in being such a man's mistress!"

"Insolent woman," exclaimed the disgusted Isabel.

"Foolish girl," said Barbara with a sneer. "You don't think to get out again, do you? bless us no; that would be giving our master much trouble about nothing. He means to make you *his wife* I understand?"

"Never," exclaimed Isabel.

"Never?" repeated the wretch; "you *will* indeed, my dear, for your consent may be dispensed with."

"Leave the room, infamous woman," cried Isabel.

"Not till I like," said Barbara; "I am mistress here, and it will be better for you to be more quiet."

"You, mistress here?" exclaimed Isabel.

"Yes, dear, just so," replied the woman.

"Let us out again then," said Margaret.

"No, no," said Barbara, with a laugh of exultation; "the man who brought you here has business with you. You go to-night to another room; so it has been arranged with our master."

"I will never leave my mistress," exclaimed the affrighted girl, clinging to Isabel.

"We shall see about that," said the woman; "I can only tell you that whatever our master orders you must submit to, for—"

"For what?" cried Isabel.

"Never mind, girls, it will be all one at the last. Take your breakfast; I can't stay talking here, I have other things to do." So say-

ing, the female fiend left the room, and secured the door as before.

"Here is a wretch for you," said Margaret, as the woman turned the key.

"There is more mischief brewing than we know of," said Isabel.

"Believe me, my kind, my adored mistress," said the girl, "I will not leave you; they shall kill me first. I would rather die a thousand deaths than leave you."

"Poor Margaret," said Isabel, as she wiped the tears from her eyes; "we shall die together then, for I begin to feel all our dangers."

"Well, then, we will die!" said Margaret, starting up from her chair; "for we will never be dishonoured."

"I almost wish the Marquis was here," said Margaret.

"Why?" asked Isabel.

"Because," replied the girl, "I would implore him upon my knees to send you home, and that Baba would assist me to escape with you."

Isabel assured her maid that she placed no

reliance upon his honour, and that she despaired of prevailing upon him to do that act of justice. It was visible to her, however, that Margaret's hopes were but feigned, and were only expressed with a view to rouse her fleeting spirits.

After much deliberation they agreed upon taking some refreshment, which they greatly needed, for they were exhausted by the fatigues of the night, and by the terrors which had so closely succeeded each other, since they had left the castle of Barsas.

A few minutes after their slight repast, Barbara re-entered the room to clear away the breakfast things, and see how things were going on.

Margaret told her that Isabel was very ill for want of rest, and begged to be left alone for a few hours, to enable them to get a little sleep.

The woman assented to the request, and retired. The relief was truly grateful to both, and Isabel proposed watching whilst Margaret should sleep, but the proposal was effectually resisted, the faithful girl insisting upon re-

versing it; to this Isabel would by no means agree, and they settled the affectionate argument by laying down together. But it was long ere they could sleep, for their minds were too turbulently agitated, and their hearts too oppressed with grief. At length, however, nature overcame sorrow, and they fell into a quiet dose.

We leave them, in this state of comparative felicity, to return to the events which followed their capture at the castle of Barsas.

CHAPTER VIII.

When Dominick was released of the presence of the ruffian who had been left in charge of him, whilst the work of iniquity was executing in Isabel's room, he began to exert his voice, and succeeded by the violence of his screams in bringing several of the servants to his assistance. The moment they heard him they spread the alarm throughout the castle that Isabel was dead, and the rush towards her apartment was so great, that the first arrived were but just entered, when they were joined by guests and their attendants, who pressed upon each other to ascertain the truth of the report.

But, what was their astonishment when they saw the doors open, the rooms in confusion, her bed drawn to the window which stood open, her apparel strewed about the floor, and Isabel no where to be found! Attracted by the groans of the aged Dominick, they

hastened to his room, and discovered him tied down to his bed, and almost dead from the excessive pain occasioned by the ropes that bound him.

He was quickly unloosed, and a thousand different questions were put to him in such rapid succession that he knew not which to answer first, and exclaimed in the fulness of his heart, and with a torrent of tears, "Where's my mistress, where's my child?"

Unable to answer the question which they themselves had asked, every one gazed at the other, and for a moment all was silence and surmise.

When Dominick had somewhat recovered from the pain he suffered, he gave an account of what had happened; of the manner in which he had been attacked, and of the preparations which for a time had gone on in his mistress's chamber.

His narrative was suddenly stopped by the Marquis de Morbiere, who was among the listeners, and who called out, "She has eloped with her lover, Albert de la Lance."

"Tis a lie," exclaimed the enraged man; "I heard your name muttered among the ruffians who took her off. It is *you*, vile wretch, who have dared to commit the crime. I accuse you of it, before these persons, and before my God."

"Scoundrel!" roared the Marquis; "I will punish you for your insolence." And he would have struck Dominick, had not Robert, who at this moment entered, seized him by the arm, and exclaimed in a voice of thunder, "Stand off, Sir, touch the honest man at your peril."

"Did you hear what he dared accuse me of?" asked the Marquis, with evident confusion.

"I did, Sir, and accuse you of the same," replied Robert, staring him full in the face.

"Were you not in your father's castle," said the haughty Marquis, "I would punish you as well as your servant."

"Tell me what you have done with my sister," said Robert, "or your life must answer for her safety."

"I know nothing of her," replied the bold wretch; "she has eloped with her lover."

"With who?" exclaimed many voices.

"With the man who wanted to have murdered her father," replied Morbiere, "Albert de la Lance."

The Countess rushed into the room, and for an instant put a stop to the dispute, by her frantic inquiries for her daughter. Dominick repeated what he had told the others, and again accused the Marquis de Morbiere of being the author of her misery, and of his own. The Marquis raised his voice to vindicate himself, and again threw the odium upon his innocent rival; but the clamour was so great that he could not be heard.

Baba's sobs made him an object of general interest; no one could comprehend the reason of his grief, but by attributing it to the attacks levelled against his master. The Countess de Barsas put this construction upon it, and clasping her hands together, exclaimed, "I beseech you, Marquis, to tell me what has become of my daughter."

"And of mine," interrupted the agonized Dominick.

"Upon my soul," answered the barbarian, "I know nothing of either, but I have cause to suspect ———." His voice faltered; he could say no more, for the accusing spirit of the murdered Montfort stood at the entrance of the door pointing at him with its armoured hand.

The terror which the apparition spread throughout the room was awful in the extreme; some of the females dropt senseless upon the floor; others sunk down upon their knees; whilst every one, male and female, were so horror-struck that they could not move, or utter a single sound, but kept their eyes fixed upon the Marquis, and the angry spirit who pointed him out as a murderer and a liar!

When it had pointed more than a minute, the spirit turned away, and glided down the long passage; every eye watched its stately progress, but it soon vanished, and the Marquis de Morbiere became the object of inquiring gazes, which he in vain attempted to avert.

"You need no stronger proof, Madam," said

the Baron de Rochefort, addressing himself to the Countess; "the solemn oath brought the angry spirit from its grave."

The Countess was too much overcome to speak; she wept bitterly, and trembled like a leaf.

"The testimony is horrible," said Robert, "but it is irresistible." "Sir," he continued, addressing himself to the Marquis de Morbiere, "you stand accused of a base offence; clear yourself of the charge, if you can."

"Was I not in my own room at the time?" asked the less terrified wretch; "Baba,—bear witness for me."

The jester sobbed, but answered not.

"I believe that you are guilty," cried the Duchess de Briançon, as she held the agonised Susan folded in her arms.

"Who cares for what *you* believe?" said the sneering culprit.

"We all care," exclaimed several voices; and the Baron de Ferneuf added, "We will punish you for your treachery."

"Tell me this instant what you have done with my sister, or follow me."

As Robert uttered these words, he stood before the Marquis.

"I know nothing of your sister, and care not what has become of her; and as for following you, I consider you as a boy, and disdain your insolence."

"Follow *me* then," exclaimed the veteran Baron de Rochefort, who considered a refusal to fight as the greatest proof of cowardice and of guilt.

"Do not be so hasty, my dear Baron," said the artful hypocrite.

"Your familiarity is ill-judged, Sir," said the veteran; "I bid you follow me if you have a spark of honour remaining."

"What honour I have," replied the Marquis, "I do not choose to exchange for the audacity of an inferior."

"Do you call *me* your inferior?" asked the angry Baron.

"I will give you no explanation," said the

Marquis, and pushing his way through the crowd which had gathered round him, he left the room. Robert and the veteran were following him, but the Countess de Barsas and the Duchess de Briançon besought them to reflect before they acted, and succeeded in bringing them back. Robert would not have been so easily persuaded if the sobs of his afflicted Susan had not reached his ears; he went to her, and assured her in the tenderest terms that he would not do any thing to grieve her.

The Marquis's departure having in some degree restored order, Dominick was again questioned, but he knew no more than he had already told, and every thing seemed ordained to remain a mystery.

Upon Dominick's evidence, a conclusion was drawn that Isabel and Margaret were let down from the window, and the position in which her bed was found, gave great likelihood to it. But some of the less unfavourably inclined to the Marquis de Morbiere, the priest, Adrien, and a few others, were of opinion that Isabel had committed suicide, and that her

maid's attachment for her had induced her, in the despair of the moment, to leap into the river after her.

Dominick's detail of their entreaties effectually proved the absurdity of this opinion, and established the fact, almost beyond a doubt, that they had really been let out of the window.

Whilst this discussion was canvassing in his room, many persons were busily employed in searching and examining every part, and every piece of furniture in Isabel's chamber. The impression of many feet were clearly perceptible by the dirt brought into the room. The mark of a rope was deeply worn into the window frame, and the same was observed round the bed; it was evident therefore that Dominick's account was true, and moreover that Isabel had been carried away by main force; and these proofs operated as forcibly against the Marquis de Morbiere as they did in favour of the unfortunate captives.

The terrible apparition of the spirit had so filled every breast with fear, that even the

bravest of the men still trembled with the cold tremor which always follows the seeing of something very horrible. All the guests at the castle had heard of the restless spectre, but they thought it only appeared in the environs of the neighbouring castle. Its visit on the present occasion they could attribute to no other cause than the impious oath of the Marquis de Morbiere, who they now believed to be in reality the long concealed murderer of Philip de Montfort. As such he could no longer be tolerated in the castle of Barsas, for the Countess herself, who at first so warmly advocated his cause, experienced a sudden conviction of his guilt, and determined to request her husband to rid her of a guest whose professions of devotion had brought misery in her family, and whose crimes were not only suspected by mankind, but proved by the irresistible testimony of supernatural agency.

The Countess being on every occasion a bigot, it was not astonishing that she should be filled with religious awe, at a time when warriors themselves acknowledged their fears,

and confessed the feelings which they experienced on beholding the spectre.

Accompanied by Adrien and the priest, she bent her steps towards the Count's apartment. The doctor met her in the anti-room, and informed her that he was asleep, and had not been disturbed by the noises which still resounded throughout the castle. He particularly desired her not to disturb him, and even assured her that he could not be informed of what had happened without endangering his life. The Countess thought it most prudent to submit, and proceeded to the saloon where all her guests had by common consent assembled. As she entered she cast her eyes on all sides in search of the Marquis de Morbiere, but he had retired to his apartment, to her great relief, and probably to his own.

Although it was customary at the Castle of Barsas to keep early hours, and that it was now considerably past midnight, no one appeared inclined to sleep, and all the guests were busily employed in talking over the terrible adventures of the night, and in trying to find

out each other's opinion of the Marquis de Morbiere.

The presence of the Countess put a stop to the conversation, for great hopes were entertained of her bringing further details, which might throw some light upon a subject so deeply enveloped in obscurity; but their expectations were not realised, as, on the contrary, she came for consolation and advice, in the painful situation to which she was reduced, by her not being allowed to consult the Count upon the steps to be pursued for the recovery of her daughter. She wept bitterly, and so great was her grief, that the veteran himself could not keep from his eyes what he blushed to betray. Nature will sometimes triumph over habit, and it so happened with him; for whilst he wiped away a falling tear, another rose in sight, and his warlike breast heaved convulsively with grief and pity.

Every one seemed to enter into the sorrows of the unfortunate Countess; even Adrien paid the tribute of a tear, and the priest appeared

moved as if he had been the friend of Isabel, and had never contributed to her misfortunes, by his interested advice in favour of the criminal Marquis. But *his* concern was not solely occasioned by commiseration for a mother's afflictions; the ghost had planted a sting in his bosom which time itself could not eradicate; his concience smote him, and he trembled lest his past duplicity should be repaid by future apparitions, of which the unerring finger might point him out as an object of revenge and contempt.

The warm-hearted Duchess wept as if Isabel had been her own child, and Susan sobbed as though she had lost a sister. Indeed, their grief exceeded the Countess's, and they mingled their tears together in the bitterest anguish. "Poor Isabel!"—"Our poor lost Isabel!" were the only words which escaped from their lips: but there was an eloquence in these broken accents, which told more than a thousand words could tell.

Susan clung to her mother's neck, unconscious of being seen, and was pressed to her

bosom with a tender warmth which none but parents know.

The Baron de Ferneuf looked on, and would have endeavoured to console them, but his feelings were too overpowering, and he turned away to muster sufficient fortitude to address them. He knew the state of Susan's heart, and that she was attached to Isabel by a double tie, which now seemed broken off, or robbed of all its charms, since the stock upon which it grew was cut off, perhaps for ever.

The spectre of the murdered Montfort had so staggered Adrien's faith in the Marquis de Morbiere, that he knew not what to advise, and dreaded as much that steps should be taken against him, as he deemed it folly to remain inactive. To all his mother's questions and entreaties, therefore, he returned but evasive answers, and shrunk from her importunities whenever he expected a renewal of her inquiries. But time was too pressing to be neglected, and she begged Robert to assist her with his advice.

"Place a guard at the Marquis's door," said

he, as if he had already turned the matter over in his mind. "Let him be declared the prisoner of the Count de Barsas, until Isabel is restored."

"We have not sufficient proof," said the Countess.

"You have," replied Robert, interrupting her.

"I think so too," added the Baron de Ferneuf.

"Do it; follow Robert's advice," said the veteran; "and I will stand responsible for the result."

"That would not clear the Countess of the charge of injustice," said the interfering priest.

"Nonsense, Sir," retorted the veteran; "has she not cause enough?"

"She has nothing but suspicion to go upon," replied the Abbe. "I think it would be better to wait, and take the Count's decision."

"You are right," said the Countess.

"You will find me so," said the priest; not a little pleased with his influence.

"I will mount my horse and scoure the

country," said the angry Robert; "Albert shall go with me."

"I forbid it," exclaimed the Countess. "I would rather know of Isabel's death, than be beholden to his services for her life."

A loud murmur spread throughout the room, as she spoke these words, her guests retired one by one, disgusted with her pride, and determined to leave her and her family to their fate.

Some few of her oldest friends still lingered behind, and endeavoured by every affectionate persuasion to prevail upon her to allow Robert to go in search of his sister, with the brave Albert de la Lance: but she continued obstinate to her declaration, and would not hear a word in favour of the proposal. Tired out by ill-success, they were giving up the point, when a servant put a note into her hand, which she opened and read with evident agitation. It ran thus:—

"My dear Countess,

"I am accused of an offence of which I am perfectly innocent, and which has made me as

miserable as you yourself can be. As your guest, and your friend, I claim, in justice to me, that you will have the business thoroughly investigated. I declare to you that I know nothing of your daughter's *flight*, but what you have been witness to; and repeat that I am *perfectly innocent* of taking any part in the affair.

" I mean to trespass upon your hospitality until you clear me of all suspicion.

" *I request you will ascertain where my insolent rival is to night!*

"(Signed) " MORBIERE."

The Countess perused the note several times, and handed it to Adrien. " Read," said she; " and tell me what you think of it."

He read and smiled; then handed the paper to the priest, who instantly turned towards his patroness and said; " It is no more than I expected of the noble Marquis. I *must* think him innocent after perusing this letter."

" I own it staggers me," said the Countess.

" *It convinces me*," said the priest.

" I am glad to hear it," said Adrien.

"What do you think of it, Robert?" said the Countess.

"Nothing," said Robert; and he left the room, followed by the Baron de Fernonf.

"Where are you going?" said he.

"To horse," replied Robert.

"I will go with you," said the Baron.

Robert shook him by the hand, and the Baron understood by the pressure, that his services were accepted, and summoned his attendants to prepare every thing for the expedition.

The horses were soon ready, and Robert and his friend, accompanied by two warriors, left the castle to repair to the dwelling of Albert de la Lance.

CHAPTER IX.

MOUNTED upon their trusty steeds, Robert and his friend were not long reaching the habitation of Albert de la Lance. It was some time, however, before they could rouse its sleepy inmates. Each summons was re-echoed through the wide forest, until, in its rapid flight, it was lost amidst the caverns of the surrounding hills; then, for a while, the silence of death prevailed, save when broken by the impatient snort of the high mettled chargers. Anxiety had supplied the place of conversation, and from the castle to the house few words were exchanged.

Robert being better acquainted with the country had kept the lead, and his friend followed, trusting to his guide, and wholly bent upon the object of their midnight excursion.

At length a female head was seen through

the narrow opening of a lattice window. Robert perceived her, and asked for her master.

"He is not at home," answered the woman.

"Not at home?" exclaimed Robert and the Baron in the same breath.

"No, Sir," replied the female.

"Where is he then?" said Robert.

"That is more than I can tell," she replied.

"How long has he been out?" asked the Baron.

"These three good hours, I should think," replied the woman.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Robert.

"It is not impossible, Sir," said she; "what I tell you is quite true, it is indeed."

"I do not doubt your word, my good woman," said Robert; "but I am astonished at your master's being out at this time of night. Can you tell me where he is gone?"

"No, Sir," replied the woman. "My master ordered his horse, and desired his two men to mount their horses, and follow him. Master looked as if he was in much trouble; he did indeed, Sir."

"Which way did he go?" asked Robert.

"Towards the castle," replied the woman; "he went off as fast as he could go. I fear something was amiss, Sir."

"What amiss?" said Robert.

"Why, Sir; a man who sometimes comes to the house, came here this evening, and asked to see master: he was let in, but what he said I can't tell, Sir; master ordered the horses before the man left the house; and he was'n't here five minutes, I assure you, Sir."

"This is strange!" said the Baron who began to harbour doubts of Albert's sincerity.

"Very," replied Robert.

"What can be done in the business now?" asked the Baron.

"What would you advise?" inquired Robert; who was at a loss how to act.

"Return to the castle," said the Baron. "There is more in this ugly affair than I like."

"Return without finding my sister?" exclaimed the startled Robert.

"It would be best," replied his friend.

"Never," said Robert: "this night must I find her."

"I fear it will be more difficult than you suppose," said the Baron. "In my opinion, you had better wait till morning, for we can do no good here. Where can the man be gone to?"

"Ask not," replied Robert, with great warmth; "I quite tremble at the thought. But, no! it is impossible, he is too honourable; I will not indulge a doubt of him."

"I fear you must," said the Baron.

"You cannot persuade me to it," said Robert; "let us seek him."

"That would be useless," said Ferneuf; "let me advise you to return to the castle. In the morning we may start again, for no good can be done to night; it is impossible to find him in the dark."

"How long do you say your master has been out?" said Robert to the female at the window.

"Full three hours, Sir," she replied.

"It is of no use then," said Robert, in a faultering and dejected voice; "let us be gone."

So saying, he turned his horse's head from the house, and led the way to the castle.

Neither the Baron or Robert seemed inclined to speak; they hung their heads down upon their chests, absorbed in thought, lost in conjecture, and mortified by the ill success of an inquiry which they hoped would have produced a very different result. The last words of the Marquis's letter presented themselves perpetually to their imaginations, and left a mysterious uncertainty which was painful to the extreme.

They reached the castle draw-bridge without exchanging a word; Robert pulled up to allow the Baron to enter first; he passed on, without noticing his friend's civility; so much was he absorbed in meditation.

When they got to the inner quadrangle, Robert halted; "What is to be done now?" said he; "I have a mind to sally out again;

this castle is hateful to me, it has lost all its charms."

"*Not all,*" replied the Baron, laying particular stress on the words.

Robert took the hint, but made no observation. "I dare not meet my mother," said he.

"Why?" exclaimed the Baron.

"Because I bring no good tidings, and that she will fancy by the ill success of our enterprize, that Albert was really involved in the diabolical deed which so distracts me."

"It is very probable," said the Baron; "and in that case you had better not mention our having been to his house."

"She must judge for herself," replied Robert; "I should be the more uncomfortable for keeping the secret. I own my good opinion of de la Lance is unaltered, and am desirous of putting the best construction upon his mysterious absence. I hope you do not doubt him?"

"I could wish I did not," said the Baron;

"but under existing circumstances there is no answering for any one."

"You wrong him," said Robert, in a tone of deep melancholy.

"I hope so," replied the Baron; "and a proof of my injustice will restore him entirely to my favour."

"It will avail little when the mischief is done," said Robert; and he followed the Baron into the castle.

The Countess having been informed of her son's departure for the dwelling of Albert de la Lance, waited in anxious expectation of his return, and was in her boudoir with the Duchess, her daughter, the priest, Adrien, and the Baron de Rochefort, when he brought the news of his unfruitful expedition.

His grief was too visible not to create great suspicions of his errand, and the expression of his countenance was immediately interpreted by the warm-hearted Duchess, and brought big tears from her eyes. It was noticed likewise by Adrien and the priest, but with dif-

ferent feelings, as a smile of exultation played round their mouths, and they seemed to glory in the misery so clearly portrayed in every look of the too wretched Robert.

"Did you find him?" said the anxious Countess.

"No," said Robert.

"Wretch!" exclaimed the Countess; "he has ruined our child!"

"He has not," said Robert, with more calmness than he had hitherto evinced; "I will forfeit my existence if he has!"

"What satisfaction will that be?" said the Countess.

"He is a man of honour," replied Robert, "and incapable of baseness, and although he may appear in a disagreeable light by the circumstance of his absence, yet do I believe that he is innocent of the charge you prefer against him."

"The Marquis would never have ended his letter so, if he had not been possessed of important information relative to Albert's guilt;

and I must own that much as I suspected him at first, so little do I suspect him now."

As she said this, the Countess cast a look of inquiry at the priest, who bowed assent.

Robert related to the Duchess the particulars of his visit, and repeated every word of the servant maid; but she could detect no appearance of guilt in any of the particulars, although she lamented the unfortunate coincidence which left a doubt upon the minds of those who were not willing to think the Marquis guilty.

So much surmise was but waste of time, and as the Countess was unwilling to have any thing done before breaking the melancholy affair to the Count, she proposed retiring to bed, and they accordingly separated for their respective apartments.

Tired as were most of the visitors at the castle; few could get to sleep, owing to the terror with which the spectre had filled them, and the dread in which they were of again beholding it. Among the most frightened was

the Marquis de Morbiere; his ponderous bed quite shook from his agitation; yet he repented not, and whilst he trembled for fear of punishment of past crimes, he meditated fresh ones, and congratulated himself upon having effectually sealed the fate of his rival by his letter to the Countess.

The capture of Isabel was in his opinion the finest coup-de-main he had ever achieved, and he promised himself to execute the remainder of his designs, and reduce her to the extremity of sharing his infamy, or of terminating a miserable existence in the dungeons of his castle.

He was no admirer of virtue, and could not appreciate its worth; it was a sport to him, and he loved nothing so well as to destroy the happiness of a girl by entangling her in the snares which he decked with all the outward ornaments of flattery and pretended affection, but which really consisted of nothing but falsehood, hypocrisy, and deception.

His perseverance in these works of destruction was unremitting, and he was continually

looked upon as a fond and sincere lover, when in truth he was only imposing upon innocent credulity, and preparing the way for the black deeds which marked every year of his life.

The vanity of the world is such, that parents are frequently dazzled into consent and too many indulgencies, by high sounding titles, and known fortunes; whether it is the fear of losing an advantageous match, the wish of adding to the importance of the family, or of bettering the situation of a child, which operates most in producing this lamentable complaisancy, it is difficult to determine; but certain it is, that men less favoured by fortune, and more by nature, would not so easily obtain the same privileges, or so effectually blind those whose duty it is to watch as much over the moral interests of youth as over their more worldly prosperity.

Gifted as he was with natural address and Satan's own deceitful face, the Marquis de Morbiere was seldom thwarted, and his sincerity as seldom questioned. Misery was sure to follow, dishonour was inevitable, unless, as

it had more than once been the case, death was preferred to ignominy and seduction.

Rich as were the family of Barsas, they had not power to resist the professions of this son of perdition. The Count listened with flattered ear to the tale of love, he smiled at the mention of a superior title, however modern consented without consulting the affections of his daughter, because he fancied it a great connexion, and was unwilling that the honour of such an alliance should be lavished upon any other family. His wife was even more blind than himself, for had not the Marquis made the proposal, it is a question whether she would not have proposed it herself, for the sake of calling Isabel a *Marquise* and of mingling the bloods of the two houses.

In former days, the feuds of the families of Barsas and Montfort commenced upon similar principles, for the late Count de Barsas was desirous of marrying the sister of the Count de Montfort, who refused him, more on account of her brother's antipathy, than on any dislike of her own, and died a few years

after. The Count never forgave what he deemed an unpardonable insult; or ever mentioned the name of Montfort without evident tokens of deep rooted hatred. He was fond of titles, and promised his daughter to the Marquis, because he liked the name, and that the man flattered him with reminding him of his own ancient pedigree, and of the great delight he derived from the prospect of quartering together the arms of Morbiere and of Barsas.

It was vanity which first laid the foundation of Isabel's unhappiness, it was vanity that made her father persist in her acceptance of the Marquis, and it was to the same contemptible vanity, that the criminal noble owed his present safety, and the means of persuading his hosts, that the humble and unassuming Albert de la Lance was the wretch who dared lay violent hands upon the lovely and virtuous sufferer.

He knew his ground well, and had long ago discovered the Count's weak side. He laid continual siege to the vulnerable part, and

made himself master of every situation by which it was possible for him to succeed and capture the prize which he seemed to court; and when secured, he cared not for the Count, because his object was dishonourable and that he knew it would be useless to ask his consent to the ruin of his child.

The great difficulty was achieved, for the poor victim was in his power, and his self-sufficiency was so great that he had not the least doubt of being able to remove Albert de la Lance from her affections, and bring her to what terms he might think proper to propose. But in those days, the females of France were not corrupt as they now are; levity of manner, flippancy of conversation, looseness of thought, were little known, and always treated with contempt; a virtuous woman was, therefore, an unspotted being in heart and mind, who valued honour more than life, and would willingly sacrifice the latter to the preservation of her fame. Such a spotless maiden was Isabel de Barsas, and the Marquis had never been so mistaken, for no woman in France was

more capable of smiling at the agonies of a torturing death, than herself.

Soon after sun-rise all was bustle at the castle, and the Doctor having sent word to the Countess that the Count wished to see her, she repaired to his bed-side, accompanied by Adrien and the priest, who she had summoned to attend her.

After making inquiries concerning his health, the Countess related as circumstantially as she was able the occurrences of the preceding night. The Count received the intelligence with more composure than she expected, and having put a few questions as to the manner in which the discovery was made, he desired to see the Marquis de Morbiere, who was accordingly called.

During the absence of the servant dispatched to him, the Countess related in such colours the apparition of the spectre, that the Count fancied the angry ghost stood beside him, and trembled at the horrible story.

"What can bring the spirit to the cas-

tle?" said he, turning his head towards the priest.

"It is restless, I suppose," replied the hypocrite, "it wishes masses said for the repose of its soul."

"Very likely," said the Count; "and pray let them be told three times a day until the spectre returns to rest. I cannot account for its coming here."

"It is an accusing spirit," said the Doctor; "I hear it pointed at the Marquis, and vanished."

"Was it so?" said the Count, raising himself upon his pillow, and looking earnestly at the Countess.

"I understand it was," she replied.

"Did you not see it then?" asked the Count.

"I cannot say but that I saw it," replied the Countess, "but surely it is of no importance. It might be fancy which led them to suppose the spectre pointed at the Marquis."

"It is very strange," said the Count.

He would have said more, but the Marquis entered the room, and of course put a stop to

the conversation. He approached the Count's bed as if nothing had happened.

"Well, dear Count, how do you feel this morning; are you better?" and he put out his hand, which was received in the usual way.

"I cannot be better after what has happened," replied the Count, "indeed I feel worse, the wound is more painful."

"I can easily imagine it," said the Marquis; "and I wish the scoundrel hanged who has brought so much wretchedness into your family. Here is our good Countess who has done nothing but weep since last night, and who looks even more ill than yourself."

"No wonder," said the Countess.

"No wonder, indeed," said the Marquis pitifully. "Could I but discover your gallant brown knight, I would split his head in twain for his infamy. It really serves you right for being so hospitable, you must take better care in future."

"Do you think he has had any thing to do with it?" said the Count.

"Think?" why my good friend, I am sure:

positively sure: there is not a doubt in the world but that he, and he alone, was the perpetrator of the crime. Why should he not carry off your daughter, as well as attempt your life?"

"We have no proof of his having done either," said the Count gravely; and not entering at all into the spirit of the Marquis's accusations.

"I think you have proof in abundance," said the Marquis; "Why did he sleep out last night? Why did he leave his house at such an unseasonable hour, and be accompanied by two ruffians as profligate as himself?"

"I do not think him profligate," said the Count, "he lives soberly in his house, and I have nothing to urge against him, but his presumption in wishing to marry Isabel."

"Why, he must be an adventurer, or a madman to think of it," said the Marquis; "surely you would not trust such a man?"

"I know not who to trust," said the Count; "people are too apt to judge from appearance. I own I have no suspicion of his

being concerned in the shameful scene of last night."

"I have," said Adrien.

"And so have I," said the priest.

"No one can doubt it," resumed the Marquis; "his guilt is clear from the very circumstance of his being out last night, at the very time of the elopement."

"My daughter never eloped, Sir," said the Count angrily, "she has too much virtue, and had I been less rigorous, the event would never have happened."

"You mean to say, had you allowed her to marry my base rival? Do I understand you right?" said the Marquis.

"Perfectly," replied the Count.

"You have a vast deal of regard for your daughter's welfare," said the Marquis, attempting to conceal his passion.

"I have had too little," replied the Count; "I might have lived longer than I shall do, if I had shown more lenity."

"Surely, my dear, you are beside yourself,"

said the Countess, "you never can mean what you say; remember the conversation we had the other day."

"I remember every word," said the Count, "and whatever I might have said, I now declare that I do not believe Albert de la Lance to be capable of baseness. I beg, therefore, that I may be left to my opinion, as I am too weak to argue a point upon which my mind is made up."

"Then you regret your daughter's not marrying him?" said the priest.

"I never confessed in public, Sir," replied the angry Count, "and I desire that no questions may be put me upon the subject."

"You are quite wrong, my dear Count," said the Marquis, "and I am sorry for your error. I intend going to-day in quest of your daughter, and will endeavour to bring her back to her duty."

"She has never gone from her duty," exclaimed the Count.

"Let it be so then," continued the Marquis; "will you promise that she shall marry me the

moment I find her, and bring her back to you?"

"Never!" exclaimed the Count, "you seem to know too much of the affair. Besides, Sir, do you think I am mad to give my daughter to a man who thinks so light of her virtue. Pardon me, Marquis, if I decline the honour you intend my family."

"What!" cried the Marquis.

"I beg to decline the honour of your name for my daughter," said the Count, calmly.

"I accept it," exclaimed the Countess, "or I leave the castle."

"You will do as you please," said the Count; "I begin to wake from my lethargy and to see things in their proper light" He paused a moment, and added in a solemn and dignified tone of voice, "Marquis, I command you to restore my child to me!"

This was a thunderbolt to the guilty Morbiere; he was confused, but soon recovered, and turning to the Countess, (making at the same time an attempt to take the Count's hand,) he said, "Your husband is merry this

morning, he wishes to amuse himself at my expence."

"Not at all, Sir," said the Count, "what I say, I mean. I shall be glad of your company as long as you like to stay at the castle, *providing* you restore my child to me, and never mention the word *marriage* again."

"If you do not joke, you mean to insult me," said the Marquis.

"I neither mean the one or the other," said the Count; "but I mean to say that I conceive *you* to be the person who has got my child from under my roof, and desire you again to restore her to her afflicted parents."

"Do not talk so, my dear," said the Countess, "you wrong the good Marquis, he is incapable of such an offence; read this letter."

The Countess put Morbiere's letter into her husband's hand; he read it carefully over, and said, "I hope it may turn out so, but I have my fears, and see nothing in the letter to alter my opinion."

"You are too unjust," said the priest.

"Never mind, Sir," replied the Count, "I am

old enough to know how to act without your advice."

"Well, Count," said the Marquis, rising from his seat, "since this is your opinion of me I will immediately assemble my people and leave your castle."

"Stay, Marquis," said the Count; "I cannot suffer you to depart, until my child is found."

"Nonsense!" said the Marquis, "you are surely joking."

"I am not," replied the Count; "and request you for your sake and for mine, to stay."

"I cannot," said the Marquis dryly; "I never brook an insult."

"You *must* stay," exclaimed the Count.

"No," said the Marquis, "I leave you this very day."

"By heavens, Sir," cried the Count, who could contain no longer himself, "you shall not pass the castle gate, until I find my child."

"I will go whenever I please," said the Marquis.

"You shall not," exclaimed the Count.

" Be it so," said the Marquis ; recollecting himself.

" Very well," said the Count ; " a few days will clear up the mystery."

The doctor had not ceased watching his patient during the whole of this conversation, and saw that unless it speedily terminated, the fever, which already manifested itself, would increase, and cause him to relapse into his former dangerous state. He perceived likewise that no good could result from the angry feelings of both parties, and informed the Count that he would not answer for the consequences of a continuance of the dispute.

" Well, Count," said Morbiere ; " I leave you to reconsider your conduct to me, and hope that in the evening you will be more dispassionate : 'till then, adieu."

The Count wished him to stay a little longer, in order to come to a clear understanding, but he left the room.

CHAPTER X.

No sooner had the Marquis retired than the Countess de Barsas began remonstrating with her husband upon the inhospitality and absurdity of his conduct towards a man of whose integrity she had not the shadow of a doubt, and of whom she would not even allow a suspicious word to be spoken.

The Count was not in the humour to retract or to vindicate himself, and desired her not to plead the Marquis's cause, as he considered him to be the only man capable of such a breach of the laws of honour.

She endeavoured to pacify him and to argue him into less hostile measures, but in vain: he had determined upon making the Marquis his prisoner until his daughter should be found, and desired Adrien to give orders that he should not be allowed to pass the gates: but he declined doing it, and Robert was sum-

moned to attend his father. When he entered the room, he was struck with the change in the Count's manner towards him, which was infinitely more affectionate than he ever remembered it to have been before. The Count held out his hand to him, and bade him sit down.

The Countess took little notice of him, and Adrien and the priest did not so much as incline their heads.

"How are you to-day?" said Robert; as he took the proffered hand.

"I am in great pain," said the Count; "but it is not to be wondered at in the present state of my mind. I wish to hear from you, my dear boy, what happened last night, and above all what you saw of the ghost."

Robert related every thing, adhering strictly to the truth, and not omitting the circumstance of the ghost's appearance when the Marquis uttered the impious oath, and its pointing at him, as if to mark him as the guilty man.

"Very strange," exclaimed the Count. "What do you think of the Marquis?"

"I never had but one opinion of him," said Robert; "and it is, I fear, more unfavourable than you would sanction."

"Do you think he carried off Isabel?" said the Count.

"I do," replied Robert; "that is, I believe that he ordered the doing of it."

"You really believe so?" said the Count.

"I do," said Robert. "Moreover, I think the witness the spectre bore against him enough to persuade any man in his senses."

"I think so too," said the Count; "and it is upon that circumstance that I found all my belief of his guilt.—How would you act in order to recover your sister."

"I would make a prisoner of the Marquis," said he.

"Shameful;" exclaimed the Countess.

"He is right," said the Count; "for it is what I have determined to do. I desire you to see that he is not allowed to pass the gates.

Let the bridge be drawn up, and have good care that he does not escape."

"You will let *me* pass the gate, I suppose," said the Countess. "For, I intend leaving the castle, if any thing of the kind is done."

"I am sorry for it," said the Count; "but Robert knows his duty better than to disobey my command, and I leave the management to him."

"You wish to drive me out of the castle then?" exclaimed the Countess.

"No, my dear," said the Count. "What I do is for the honour of my house, it is justice to my children; and if he is innocent it can be no injury to him; but if, on the contrary, he should turn out to be guilty, I mean to make an example of him, and shall be glad to have him in my power. Go, Robert, see that all is done."

Neither the priest or Adrien thought it prudent to remonstrate, or even comment upon the Count's orders, which both considered little short of madness, and calculated to produce a rupture between the two nobles.

The Countess was leaving her husband, when Robert rushed breathless into the room, and exclaimed, "He has escaped; he is gone!"

"Escaped?" said the Count.

"Yes," replied Robert; "he has been gone about a quarter of an hour. He mounted his horse, and set off at full speed; taking the jester with him, and leaving the rest to follow: they are now preparing to depart."

"I thought as much," said the Count. "Now, Madam, what do you think of him?"

"I think he is right," said the Countess. "Who would allow himself to be made prisoner if he could help it?"

"So it does not open your eyes to his guilt?" said the Count.

"No," she replied; "I still think him innocent."

"It is too absurd," said the Count. "I am now fully persuaded, and have not a doubt remaining. What can we do, Robert?"

"I really cannot tell," he replied. "Allow me to call Ferneuf and Rochefort, they may perhaps give us seasonable advice."

"I would with all my heart," said the Count; "but I am in too much pain at present; I must rest a little while, and will send you word when I can see them. I am very ill, very ill indeed."

"You must not vex so," said the Doctor. "You do yourself considerable injury."

"I would not mind the pain if I could but see my poor Isabel again." The Count wept bitterly as he said this.

"You will see her again," said the Doctor; "she will be restored to you."

"Never to *me*," said the Count. "I shall never see her again. I shall not live long enough. I am very bad."

"You are in no danger," said the Doctor. "Keep your mind easy, and you will mend apace."

"You deceive yourself, Doctor," said the Count. "I know my state: the wound is becoming much inflamed, and I have a great idea that the shaft was poisoned."

"Not the least," said the Doctor. "It had

no appearance of it. I examined it carefully, and saw nothing venemous about it."

"Well, well," said the Count, apparently resigned to the worst; "we shall see. It would be misery to die without seeing my child: I quite shudder at the idea, and yet I never recoiled from death before. How long do you think I can live?"

"Many a long year," replied the Doctor.

The Count shook his head, and desired his family to leave him. They accordingly left the room, and went to the breakfast hall, where all the guests who remained at the castle were assembled.

For the first time the Countess felt awkward, and unwilling to enter into conversation, but (as if from natural instinct) she moved by degrees by the side of the Baron de Rochefort, who immediately asked her whether she had any tidings of her daughter. She could give but a negative answer, and he asked her what had become of the Marquis de Morbiere; she coloured deep crimson at the question,

and told him what had happened in the morning. The veteran was not the least surprised at the recital, and assured her it was no more than he expected, as that a man of the Marquis's cast was capable of any enormity. Every word was an insult to the Countess, who still believed him innocent; at least she professed herself to believe him so, and was not willing to be undeceived. To all, except Adrien, the priest, and herself, the Marquis's flight was an indubitable proof of his being the author of the preceding evening's crime, and of the wound inflicted upon the Count. Even the Baron de Ferneuf, who had betrayed so much suspicion of Albert de la Lance, recovered from his error, and apologised to Robert for the injustice he had done him.

It was no small satisfaction to the Duchess de Briancon to hear the opinion thus generally established of the guilt of the Marquis de Morbiere, for at the same time that it cleared de la Lance of the charge laid against him, it did away with all possibility of Isabel's having connived in the affair.

Much of the day passed on without bringing any tidings of Isabel, the Marquis, or of Albert de la Lance, at whose house Robert had sent a request that as soon as he should return, he might be informed of it, or see him at the castle.

The party were just sitting down to dinner when the brown knight was announced, and Albert himself closely followed the servant into the hall. As he entered he raised his visor, and made obeisance with so much genuine dignity, that every one present rose from their seats, and returned the reverence as they would to their superior in birth.

But the charm lasted not an instant, for the Countess gathered up her brow, and turning to Adrien, as the only one from whom she could expect support, exclaimed with her natural haughtiness, "What wants the Sieur de la Lance here?"

"I obey the Count's mandate," said the knight.

"My father desired him to come," said Robert; "and by his presence, to prove his innocence of the crime alleged against him."

"What crime?" cried the astonished Albert, loosing Robert's hand; which had been warmly tendered upon his entrance into the hall.

"Innocent, by heavens," exclaimed the veteran; "I pledge you, brave knight," and he drank off a goblet of wine which had that moment been placed before him.

"Thank you, Baron," said Albert; "you do me honour." He would have smiled as he spoke, but a cloud of deep melancholy overspread his fine countenance, which in all its native majesty had something irresistibly fascinating, which it did not even lose when oppressed by adversity and sorrow.

"What crime am I accused of?" asked the knight; "I stand here ready to answer to God and man; I charge you, tell me."

"None, you are guilty of no crime," exclaimed the whole party, with the exception of the Countess, Adrien, and the priest.

"You are accused of carrying off my sister," said Robert, in a firm tone of voice.

"Of that," said Albert, placing his hand upon his breast, and heaving a deep sigh; "Heaven knows that I am indeed innocent!"

"I believe you," said the Duchess, whose sobs rendered her voice scarcely audible.

"You may," replied the knight.

The Countess had by this time resumed her seat, and the priest who loved to display his importance by his studious mimickry of all she did, and anxious to add to her rudeness, a specimen of his insolence, sat down immediately after her, and began taking his dinner as if nothing unusual was going on in the room; Adrien followed his example; but every one else continued standing, appearing unwilling to re-seat themselves whilst the gallant brown knight stood before them.

It was evident by the state of his massive armour, that he had been on some long expedition, and his face strengthened the impression; but his person was unbent by the weighty metal, which seemed to hang as light upon him as a morning vest.

"If he wants my father," said Adrien, raising his eyes from his plate, towards the knight, "he had better be sent to him."

"I will *conduct* him," said Robert, casting a look of contempt at his insolent brother. "Come, Albert, you will be better received by him." So saying, he thrust his arm in the knight's, and led him out of the hall.

The company re-seated themselves, and every voice was unanimous in his favour. Susan was no less delighted than her mother, who felt towards the unfortunate knight as she would for her own child. "I wish my boys had been here to see the brave man," said she to her daughter. "I wish they had," replied Susan. But the wish was vain, for they had left two days before, to return to their castle.

The happy restoration of Isabel to her family, could hardly have given the veteran and his friend the Baron de Ferneuf more happiness, than they felt at the magnanimous way in which the brown knight presented himself in the castle of Barsas, which he knew to be filled with enemies, from whom he

could expect but ill-treatment, injustice, and insult.

A man coming forward as he did, had every possible claim to belief, and could certainly not be guilty; had he been so, he was safer out of the castle, and would have secured his liberty by a precipitate retreat, as had already done the guilty Marquis de Morbiere. With a clear conscience, an honest heart, and an upright mind, he was capable of facing every danger, and willing to place himself in the power of his deadliest enemies; he had served bravely under the banners of the cross, and feared none but God, in whom he trusted, and under whose special protection he considered every virtuous member of the community to be.

On reaching the anti-room leading to the Count's sleeping apartment, Albert recommended his friend's going forward to apprise him of his arrival. The moment the knight's name was mentioned, the Count's face was covered with a deep flush, occasioned by the remembrance of the wrongs he had done

him; but the colour soon gave way to his former paleness, and Albert was admitted.

He approached the sick bed with the same dignified manner as he had entered the hall, and drew near to the Count, who held out his feeble hand to him in exchange for the knight's gauntlet with which his hand was covered. Albert was in the act of pulling it off, but the Count desired him not; adding, "Do not challenge me in my present state."

Although it was visible that the Count wished to soothe the Knight's feelings by more affability than he had ever condescended to show him, he did not appear too eager to receive the proffered kindness, and notwithstanding his expressing himself flattered by his civility, he kept the Count at a distance and proved that he had no wish to push himself upon him, or to turn the present opportunity of a favourable impression to his advantage. This propriety of conduct was not unnoticed by the Count, in whose opinion it considerably raised him.

"I have taken the liberty to request a visit

from you for several reasons," said the Count. "The first is to ask you as a man of honour, whether you were in any way concerned in the capture of my poor lost Isabel?"

"Upon the honour of a knight," said Albert; "upon the holy cross, I swear that I had no hand in her capture."

"I am satisfied," said the Count; "allow me again to ask you, upon the word of a gallant knight, whether you had any hand, directly or indirectly, in inflicting upon me the wound with which I am now laid up?"

"I take the blessed Virgin to witness that I never had;" as he uttered these words, the knight rose from his chair and stood upright, as to give more solemnity to them.

"I am satisfied," said the Count; "pray answer me another question, and pardon the impertinence of it. What became of you last night? where were you when Robert called upon you, about the hour of midnight?"

"I heard of Isabel's being carried off, and attended by my two men, endeavoured to find her, and restore her to you; but I missed the

road, or the cavalcade must have taken an unbeaten track, and rode all night; I am just now returned without seeing or hearing any thing of her."

"I believe every word you speak," said the Count.—"I have another question to ask; who do you suspect of having carried off my daughter?"

"I cannot hesitate in my answer," replied the knight; "I believe the Marquis de Morbiere to have done it, and to have been instrumental in wounding you. The man who was base enough to attempt to murder me, is base enough for any thing. I do not think the bolt was intended for you; I was the intended victim."

"I never heard of the circumstance before," said the Count.

Robert related the whole of what had happened to his friend when under Isabel's window.

"I have no more doubts," said the Count, covering his face with both hands; "It is too clear; I now see my folly, and have lost

my child. Oh! Isabel, forgive your cruel father, forgive me, my child! have pity upon me! —Find her, generous man, I have not long to live. Bring me my Isabel that she may forgive her dying parent!"

"Compose yourself, my dear Count," said the Doctor; "you have nothing to fear."

"You don't know the pain I suffer," said the Count; "I have been getting worse for many hours; my whole side is swollen."

"You deceive yourself," said the Doctor; drawing nearer to his patient.

"No, no," said the Count, "I do not deceive myself. I feel a gnawing pain within the bone; believe me, Doctor, the shaft was poisoned."

"Do not frighten yourself with such an idea," said the Doctor; "where do you feel most pain?"

"Every where," said the Count; "it spreads wider and wider.——My leg will burst."

"Let the Doctor look at it," said Albert; "perhaps it may be better than you think; pain is frequently followed by speedy cure."

The Count shook his head, and said, "you may look at it."

The Doctor removed the bed-clothes, and turned pale as death.

"Gracious God!" exclaimed Robert; "is my father worse?"

"Your poor father is dying," said the Count; "nothing can save me, the poison is taking effect."

Albert endeavoured to soothe him.

"It is useless," said the Count, mournfully; "a few brief hours must terminate my life. Forgive me, my poor injured Isabel; forgive a repenting father. God have mercy upon me, and bless my children."

"Do not weep so, my dear father," said Robert, whose tears ran in streams down his cheeks. "You will not be taken from us yet; trust in the mercy of Heaven."

"I do, I do trust," said the agonized parent; "not for life, my poor boy, not to see you many more hours, nor to see my injured Isabel again; but, for forgiveness of my offences,

and the blessing of the Almighty on a fatherless family."

"My father," "My dear Count," exclaimed Robert and the Knight together.

"I am indeed a father," said the Count with a faultering voice; "but, in a few hours I shall be a corpse,—a murdered corpse!—Go, one of you, go, brave Knight, bid my wife, and Adrien;—bid my friends come here; bring me the Duchess and Susan.—No! I cannot spare you, send a servant for them."

Albert did as he was desired, and returned to the sick room.

The few moments which elapsed to the time of the family's arrival were employed by the Doctor in dressing the wound, already in a state which proved but too plainly that the shaft was envenomed, and being so high as to render amputation impossible, no hope remained of saving the unfortunate Count's life.

When the Countess entered and saw every one in tears, the sad tale required no telling,

for it was written upon her husband's countenance. She came close to him, and bathed him with her tears.

"I sent for you," said the Count, "to soften the pangs of death, for after living so many years together, we must part."

"*You* have brought all this misery upon us," exclaimed the Countess, shaking her hand convulsively at Albert de la Lance.

"Accuse him not, I charge you," said the Count; "he is innocent:—the Marquis is the only criminal:—the shaft was poisoned. But this is no time for discussion; where is Isabel, have you any tidings of her?"

"None," said the Countess.

"Then all is over," said the Count; "I die completely miserable.—Burst, my full heart, and put an end to this wretchedness. Oh! my lost, my innocent and injured child; my Isabel! forgive thy father; forgive him, dear! and reproach not his unoffending corpse. Take my soul! Oh! my God! in pity have mercy upon me; have mercy upon me!"

"You will get better yet," said the Duchess, hoping to cheer him.

"Adieu, my friend," said the Count; "be more merciful to your child, than I have been to mine.—Where is Susan?"

The sobbing girl drew nearer to him. "Give me your hand, child," said the Count, whose voice became so weak as to be scarcely audible; "bend forward, Susan." He embraced her.—"Give that dying kiss to my Isabel, if you ever see her again. Tell her, her poor father dies by the hand of an assassin, by the hand of him who would have been her husband: and tell her that he could have died happy if he had but beheld her once more.

"Robert, I know you love this dear girl; I can make but one reparation for the injury I have done your sister: should you ever wish to be united you have my dying blessing!" He joined their hands together, and turning his eyes up to heaven, said, "God bless you!" He paused an instant amidst the sobs of those that surrounded him, and then added in a

firmer voice, "From you, brave Knight, I implore pardon for the wrong I have done you, and as the only act of justice I can perform at this awful moment, I declare that you have my consent and blessing to marry my daughter, if she should ever be restored to her family, and *if you can prevail upon my wife to give her sanction to your union.*"

Albert was too much affected to answer; he said something at last, but the words were lost amidst the agonizing expressions of grief of all around him.

The priest approached the Count, and began praying aloud.

"Go, Sir," said the dying man; "you cannot pray with sincerity: you can offer me no consolation. I forgive you."

The priest retired, and did not again offer his assistance.

We must leave those whose heart-breaking task it has been to witness the last agonies of death, to picture the scene which the chamber exhibited. No pen can describe the pangs of a surviving wife, of children who behold a

dying parent, of friends to lose the companion of their younger days, of all who, at such a moment, think, that in a few short years, perhaps a few fleeting hours, they will be gathered off by the unsparing hand of death. We will not harrow up the youthful heart with scenes which they may never have beheld, we will not parch the quivering lip, and dry the streaming eye, with the last efforts of struggling nature. 'Tis enough—the hour arrived, and the Count de Barsas breathed his last!

CHAPTER XI.

When the first paroxysm of grief had rather subsided, and when nature exhausted by its efforts suspended for a moment the distracting pangs of an overflowing heart, the Countess looked round as if to seek compassion from the friends about her, and beheld the careworn, yet majestic face of Albert de la Lance. She turned from the corpse of her husband and exclaimed, "Go, Sir, insult not my grief by remaining here; I desire you will never presume to disturb the peace of this castle by your presence." The tone in which she spoke was so imperative that it enforced immediate compliance from the insulted Knight, who left the room without making a single comment upon the Countess's conduct, or heeding the persons present, who endeavoured to detain him in hopes that the dying words of the Count would recur to the memory of his wife, and

that Albert would at last obtain the consent which he (had he been more sanguine) might have been induced to expect.

Not so, however, with the Brown Knight; he had too much feeling to intrude at such a moment, or to raise a dispute in the chamber of sorrow; he had too much pride to remain where he was not welcome, and too much knowledge of the world to believe for an instant, that the Countess's malignant hatred of him would turn to less hostile feelings by the request, or the entreaties, of a dying husband. He knew that grief has its term, and that the most poignant despair will sometimes give way to a stronger contending passion. It was so with the widow; she burst forth in expressions of anger, even by the side of her husband's corpse; and for a moment forgot that her feelings had been excited by any other object than the Knight. As soon as he had left the room, however, her grief returned, and she was as inconsolable as she had been before she perceived him. Strange perverseness of human nature! These contending feelings were

no sooner roused within the breasts of all around her, than from different causes they became as indignant as herself. Her conduct, at such a time, towards a man whose innocence was established beyond the possibility of doubt, was reason enough for anger, and for the hostile feelings, to which she again gave birth by the strangeness of her conduct.

On many previous occasions the Countess de Barsas had evinced the same animosity towards Albert de la Lance, and had ever been his greatest enemy. His want of title was the original cause of her dislike, and the fear of her daughter's being united to a man of moderate fortune, gave rise to the implacable hatred which followed, and to the insult which she now offered him; a breach of decorum, the less to have been expected, since his attendance upon the Count, at the last moment of his life, ought to have reconciled her to him, and have smothered every feeling, save those which the expiring man had attempted to create, by giving his last consent to his union with his Isabel.

Even among barbarians, the request of the dying is considered sacred, and had Albert de la Lance been at such a time among the savage tribes of Africa, it would have been attended to. It was otherwise at the Castle of Barsas; the Countess indulged her own feelings, and was seconded by Adrien and the ever-officious priest, who saw in the Count's death the fulfilment of his warmest hopes, by the certainty of inheriting so much influence and authority, as it was possible for any third person to enjoy.

No sooner had the hand of death closed the eyes of the once haughty and magnificent Count, than the priest drew near to the Countess, and began whispering into her ears the artful strains which had so raised him in her opinion. He knew that to check her grief would produce an unfavourable effect, and therefore encouraged it, and flattered affliction itself, to lay up a store of influence which might avail him at other times.

The Knight's obedience to the Countess's command was a joyful triumph to the priest,

for he wished him every evil, and felt so anxious to give vent to his satisfaction, that he could with difficulty keep up the face which he had put on to play his bounden part in the sad tragedy of the day. He managed, however, and contented himself with whispering his praises of his patroness's dutiful anxiety for propriety, in wishing to turn from the corpse of her deceased lord, a person who had been so obnoxious to him during his life.

The Countess listened, and inwardly smiled; for much as she had loved the Count, she loved flattery still better, and could not resist the power of its charms.

After a while the Countess was led from the room, and followed by every one except the Doctor, whose melancholy duty it was to see that the body was laid out in the usual form. Accustomed to such scenes, and to such duties, he perhaps showed more composure than any member of the family; not but what he was truly grieved at the loss of his patron, for he was really attached to him, although there were many traits in his character which he

disliked, some which he despised, and few which he had cause to admire.

The scene was dreadful to one individual present, to the youthful Susan:—gifted with nature's warmest heart; charitable, kind, and affectionate; full of feeling, and of the finer and more delicate sentiments of the soul, she was capable of entering into the sufferings of others, and of exerting herself beyond her strength to console them. She was thus employed with the Countess, and with Robert, whose grief was unaffectedly poignant. Unjust as the Count had always been to him; partial as he had ever shown himself to his elder brother, to his own eminent discomfort and mortification, he felt as an affectionate son, and wept genuine tears of sorrow upon the lifeless body of the author of his existence. Better had it been for Adrien if he had felt the same; he had greater cause for sorrow; he had suffered a greater loss: for to him his father was always kind; always showed him a preference which he denied his brother; always looked up to him as a superior man,

much as he was really inferior to the more benevolent, the more affectionate Robert.—But he was the elder, and human nature, in its weakness, clings to the object of first hopes, and refuses to a second and third pledge, what it so scrupulously stores for the first-born.

By his father's bedside, Robert forgot how little he had been loved, and watched with tender solicitude every step of the disease, and every look of his parent: but little did he expect the reward which followed. Years of unkindness, the tears of youth, and sighs of manhood, were forgotten in an instant, when the Count joined his hand to Susan's, and gave them his blessing. The value of the gift was heightened by the awfulness of the time, and made an impression upon the hearts of the youthful couple, which could never be obliterated.

The Duchess looked on, and breathed a fervent amen to the Count's blessing; she pressed Robert's hand in token of her own consent, and imprinted on Susan's cheek one of those maternal kisses, which expressed

so much more than the tongue could speak, that words were not wanting to tell her that she should have her wish, and marry the man of her heart. Eagerly as this kindness would have been received at any other time, it was now acknowledged by a mute return of her mother's embraces; but Susan was too full of woe to feel the whole value of what had happened to her, and too wretched at the sufferings of the unfortunate Count to indulge a thought of herself.

Having left the late Count's room, every one retired to their respective apartments, to give way to their long-repressed feelings, and condole with each other on the sad event which filled the castle with mourning.

When Dominick heard the melancholy tidings he shed tears of bitter anguish, for his heart was almost rent with misery for the loss of Margaret; and now that, after losing mistress and daughter, he lost his master, he had not strength to resist the agony of his grief, and ran from chamber to chamber, piercing the air with lamentations, and calling

by their names those who could neither hear nor answer him.

Finding every room forsaken, the distracted man sought the offices to tell his fellow servants of his woe, and catch every straggling word that could explain how his master died. He heard every thing concerning the Count; particulars had already reached the very gates of the castle; but not a word of Isabel, not a word of Margaret, could he hear from any one.

He sat himself down in despair, and wept on; too miserable to listen to any other subject, and too wretched to give ear to the efforts which were made to console him. One voice alone caught his attention, for the sounds of rustic pity touched his very heart.

"Weep on, weep on, master Dominick, and God give you tears. Weep on, friend Dominick, and be not comforted. Let the drops roll down, and wipe them not; let the ground be moistened with them that they be not lost. Your hairs are grey, your cheeks are drawn, your years are many; yet you're not so old but you'll see far better days, and not so wretched

but that you'll be happy ere you die. Mark the times, Master Dominick! I told you as much as what has happened, and you took no heed of what I said; the things are coming to pass. You remember about the signs; you know what I said of the birds of prey, and of the wolves. You know what I told you of the ill-looking man who met me in the forest; all this you know. I see this castle shake, Master Dominick; and its better days are now gone past. There's no more joy, there's no more mirth, no more dancing, no more games and the like; their day is past.

"The love of us all, and your girl, are both away, and God knows where; for he knows all things, and when he pleases they will be found again. Well you may cry, and my tears fall fast with yours; but there's no comfort, for the day is not at hand, and our tears are vain. Weep on then, poor old Dominick; weep on."

"It is too much," said Dominick; "my heart will burst; it is more than I can bear. Has anything been heard of my mistress and of my Margaret?"

" Nothing," answered the man to whom he addressed himself.

" No," resumed the wood-cutter; " nor will you hear as yet, the time's not come. I hear your Marquis ran away this morning, and what is that but a proof of guilt? It was he who carried off the Lady Isabel and your child; no one can doubt it. But he's a great man, and poor folk must hold their tongue, and not accuse. I would wager my life that the ill-looking man who used me so, was in his pay: he looked like it. Mark my words, Master Dominick; this castle will not move a step to claim the maids; nothing will be done. But deed will come upon deed, and the end will be that you'll get your child again. How soon this will happen, no man can tell. Last night I knew that evil was about, and told my wife as much; for a strange dog howled about the house, and we got no sleep all night."

" And I thought we should hear of a death," said the steward; " for I could not keep my candle free from winding sheets."

"I saw a crow fly straight over the Count's apartment this morning," said another servant.

"What are these but signs?" said the wood-cutter; "I hope you'll believe me now, and give credit to what I say."

Dominick could hear no more; he left the servant's hall, and returned to his mistress's room, where he began indulging in the melancholy task of setting to rights all that had been strewed about.

Each object refreshed in his memory the remembrance of the scenes of the preceding night, and all was calculated to keep up the state of mental wretchedness to which he was reduced.

He had been so many years under the late Count's roof, that he was domesticated with every thing in the castle; and custom had so implanted into his memory the different arrangements which were usually attended to, that he missed whatever object was not in its proper place. Thus he became acquainted with the extent of the depredation which had been com-

mitted, and found that many articles were wanting, which were certainly not taken for Isabel's accommodation. It appeared by this that the men who had been employed to carry her off had been guilty of double theft, and had stolen whatever was most portable and concealable. Fortunately the bulk of her jewels was deposited in a strong closet in Dominick's room, by which means they escaped the hands of the midnight robbers.

Adrien and the priest succeeded in their endeavours to prove that Isabel herself had connived at her being carried off, and the strongest testimony which could, in their opinion, be given, was the carrying away of her trinkets and dresses, as they good-naturedly hinted that de la Lance's want of fortune made it probable that he would gladly avail himself of every little to add to his own. And this, said they, could never have been done by the Marquis de Morbiere; for his fortune placed him above every thing of the kind.

The more Dominick thought of such villany, the more wretched he was, seeing no

probability of the present Count's taking effectual steps for the recovery of his young mistress and of his lamented Margaret.

In this conclusion he was right, for there was in reality nothing to hope from a man who was thoroughly devoted to the Marquis de Morbicre, and who had no particular objection to such conduct as his, if it were even true that he had taken off his sister.

Adrien set his face entirely against all supposition of his friend's being concerned in the murder of his father; the only person he suspected was Albert de la Lance, and he had not hesitated to declare him the author of the crime.

The whole of this melancholy day passed on without producing anything new; no tidings came of Isabel, no clue was obtained that could lead to her recovery. Tears alone were seen throughout the castle, and the kind of apathy which generally succeeds violent grief.

Nor was the awful quiet of the night disturbed by the re-appearance of the spectre, which strengthened the impression that the

guilty Marquis was the only object of its nocturnal visitations. The terrors of the last night more than once started across the agitated brain of the sleepless inmates of the castle; every time the setting watch called out in deep and long-drawn strain, "All's Well," they trembled as if the ghost was by their bed-side.

The image of the pallid corpse of the murdered Count de Barsas, which every one had from motives of respect or of curiosity visited, and close to which they had told their beads, was perpetually before their unclosed eyes, and the night was passed in sorrow, in prayer, and in momentary expectation of seeing the more alarming and more dreadful spirit of the murdered Montfort.

The cheering beams of the rising sun dispelled these fears as it diffused its golden rays over the crimsoned horizon; and at an early hour the scenes of life were again in action, although no one appeared the least refreshed by the night's repose, and many eyes were red from the tears with which they had for so many successive hours been filled.

Scarce had the sun ascended above the earth, when Robert was seen moving busily through the castle courts. His steps were hurried, and his look oppressed with grief.

His father in his dying moments having given him full powers to do what he should think necessary for the recovery of his lost sister, he was busily employed in giving orders for arming an expedition to be directed against the castle of Morbiere. The willing vassals received the command with eagerness, and were ready to risk their lives for a man whom they really loved, and for the unfortunate Isabel, who they sincerely pitied and almost adored; there was not a vassal on the whole estate who did not owe her gratitude for some act of kindness, which they were happy of an opportunity to repay by the services of their arms.

Robert was thus busily employed, when he was joined by Adrien, by whom he was closely interrogated. The *recent* death of his father had not prevented his thinking of his new and unexpected promotion, and he availed himself

of this early opportunity to countermand every thing Robert had ordered, and forbid any thing being done without *his* previous permission or sanction. Having given neither the one or the other, he looked upon his brother's interference as an infraction of his peculiar privileges.

The soldiery who were checked in this abrupt manner, appeared much inclined to mutiny, and to follow Robert, for they were careless of the present Count's displeasure, and would gladly have risked it, to assist their young mistress, and obey their first orders; but Robert would not suffer them to depart from their allegiance, and reminded them that they were now vassals of another lord, and that they were bound to obey him. It was not without considerable resistance that he prevailed upon them to listen to his remonstrances, and not without a positive declaration that he would not head them after what had been said by his brother, that he brought them to submission.

Nevertheless, dissatisfaction became general, and the dislike in which Adrien had always been held now turned to hatred. Robert was aware that this was the case, but out of respect for the remains of his deceased father, he forbore saying a word which might be likely to create clamour, or unrestrain the feelings which were so ready to burst forth from every breast.

Mortified as Robert must naturally have been, and indignant as he certainly was at the cruel conduct of his unnatural brother, he repressed his anger, and casting a look of heartfelt disdain upon him as he returned to the castle, left him to give his own orders, and make such arrangements as were now within his power to prescribe.

In assuming the title and importance of the Count de Barsas, Adrien seemed to forget that his father and predecessor was still unburied, and although the ceremony of interment was always performed in France much sooner after decease, than it has ever been customary in

colder climates, and that the remains lay but a few hours for the awful solemnity of public exhibition; the young Count seized upon the reins of government and commanded with as much haughtiness as if he had been for a long series of years instituted into the power which had so unexpectedly devolved upon him.

It is needless to say that Adrien was totally void of feeling and of any of those virtues which render men ornaments of society and endear them to their fellow creatures; but he blushed not for his want of sensibility, he cared not for the good opinion of the world, as he was now possessed of all he ever longed for; —wealth and title.

CHAPTER XII.

At the castle of Morbiere events of considerable importance happened during the time which intervened from the morning of the Count's death to the following one.

Our heroine and her no less afflicted maid passed a bad and restless night; for although the fatigues which they had undergone produced some short intervals of sleep, the remainder of the time was spent in unprofitable speculations and in an interchange of hopes and fears which could in no way assist them or hold out great prospect of relief.

The bright rays of the morning sun which forced their way through the thick coat of dust which covered the windows, were truly welcome to the poor captives. Isabel desired her maid to let in a little fresh air, but the task was impossible, as the casements were firmly fastened, and baffled all attempts to open them.

After a long and diligent search, Margaret discovered a single diamond pane of glass fixed into a small iron frame, but it appeared as if the hinges had been long out of use, and required all her exertions to overcome the impediments which rust and decay opposed. At length, however, she succeeded, and trifling as was the breath of air which it admitted, still was it a comfort to Isabel, who was so weak and unwell that she almost fainted from the musty closeness of the room.

Soon after they were dressed Barbara undid the outer fastenings of the well secured door, and brought breakfast.

"Well, my loves," said the old wretch, "how do you thrive this morning. You've had a pleasant night I suppose. To be sure you must have been comfortable; so good a bed is not found in every castle now a-days. Bless me, how solemn you look; you would have me think that you don't like being here, but I know better; aye, aye, I know better."

Isabel held her peace, but the woman was determined to annoy her, and continued, "Our

master will be soon here, and then I suppose you will smile again ; I've seen such tricks as yours before now ; you ar'n't the first girl I've had the care of, no, no, not by many a one. But I'll tell you one thing, you'd better keep your faces to yourself when our master comes, for he'll soon send you down stairs, and there you may kick and chirp, and cry and howl, and nobody care for you. You are not the kind of woman to give so much trouble."

"You had better let us alone," said Margaret, who could not bear to hear her mistress insulted.

"Well," rejoined the woman, "I don't care if I do ; you may have your own way now, but you will soon have to do some one else's will. We poor servants are always put upon by you fine wenches."

So saying, she left the room and fastened the door as scrupulously as she had done the night before.

"She is gone," exclaimed Margaret.

"Yes, my good girl," replied her mistress, "she is indeed gone, but when shall *we* go?"

" Very soon, I hope," quoth the maid.

"I fear not," said Isabel, " for I have no doubt from the woman's insolence that some dreadful evil is in agitation. What think you, Margaret ?"

" I hope not," answered the poor girl.

" This is a sad woman," said Isabel.

" She is indeed," replied the maid ; " she would not do at my master's castle ?"

" No indeed," said Isabel. " I would give the world to know how my father is ; I have been dreaming of him all night, and thought he was worse. Once I fancied he was dead. I had dreadful dreams ; I really think I shall grow mad."

" You must not let your mind get the better of you so, my dear mistress," said the kind-hearted maid, " I wish you were more cheerful."

" I wish I had reason for it ;" said Isabel.

" So do I," said Margaret, " but we must make the best of every thing, and wait patiently for better times."

With such dialogues the two prisoners

passed away the heavy hours; starting at every sound and listening with eager anxiety, in hopes to catch the distant murmur of known voices, and of deliverers; but in vain.

Early in the evening Barbara came to them and announced the arrival of her master. Isabel shuddered at the name, and would have sent him some insulting message; but prudence pointed out the danger of it, and she attempted to receive the intelligence with indifference. She had no time to consider, for the Marquis followed close after her, and entered the room as familiarly as if he had been in the habit of being unceremoniously admitted into her private apartment. He approached her with revolting hardiness, and stretched out his hand, saying at the same time, "How is my Isabel?"

The indignant girl turned from him with a look of utter contempt; but he had too much effrontery to be abashed, and repeated the question, adding, "and how is her pretty Margaret?"

"Your familiarity is too ill placed," exlaimed Isabel; "tell me, Sir, by whose authority we are detained here."

"By *mine*," said the murderer.

"You dare not detain us," said she; "I command you to release us."

"No, my sweet girl," said Morbiere, making an attempt to wind his arm round her waist, "I cannot spare you. You are now *at home*, and you must remain here."

"What does the monster mean?" exclaimed Isabel.

"Never mind," replied the Marquis; "every word from your lips is music to my ear: your abuse I regard not; it is woman's weapon."

"Send me home to my parents," cried Isabel.

"Not for the world!" exclaimed the Marquis; "you shall be my pretty little wife, and stay here with me."

"I will never be your wife," cried the spirited Isabel.

"Then you shall be something else," rejoined the Marquis.

"What do you mean?" said Isabel, in a tone of indignation.

"Never mind my meaning, you will find it out by and bye," replied the Marquis. "Come, Isabel, do not be so hard-hearted; I know you can love me, if you will."

"I would rather die!" exclaimed our heroine.

"You talk like a girl," said the Marquis; "I know you will love me in time. Give me your hand, and do not be angry with me."

"Keep off, vile man!" cried she; "how have you dared to rob me from my parents?"

"Love," replied the Marquis, attempting to smile a tender look, but betraying himself into a sneer, "love will do wonders. You know I adore you—that I cannot; will not live without you; you know my sincerity."

"I know nothing," said Isabel, with firmness, "nor will I know any thing. Had you really loved me, had you been a man of honour, you would never have been guilty of this act of violence. If you have, as you say, such a regard for me, grant me one request."

"What is it?" exclaimed the Marquis.—
"Restore me to my family."

"I cannot at present comply with your request," said he; "you shall go when I can no longer keep you here."

"When will the happy day be?" exclaimed Isabel.

"Not yet," he replied: "you shall love me first; you shall be my own Isabel, my own love; my own every thing."

"Do not deceive yourself," said she calmly, "I can never love you, never respect, never tolerate you. You have for many reasons made yourself hateful to me, and my sentiments can never alter. I therefore desire you, and if my desire will not do, I implore you, to restore me to my beloved parents."

"And to your low-lifed lover, I suppose," said he. "No, Isabel, I will render your family a better service; I will keep you from this self-sufficient upstart."

"Who dare you call 'upstart?'" exclaimed Isabel.

"Your milk-sop of a lover," said he, sneer-

ing contemptuously at her; your Albert, your *dear* Albert."

"He is dear to me, Sir," said Isabel; "and your abuse, far from lessening my affection for him, can only increase it."

"You must, nevertheless, give him up," said the Marquis, "for I intend being called by the *dear* title which he has dared to usurp."

"Cease your sports, Sir," exclaimed the angry girl; "they are insulting and unbecoming."

"Will you promise to love me, then?" said he, catching hold of her with both his arms, and pressing her against him.

"Let me go, insolent ruffian!" exclaimed Isabel.

"Give me a kiss, then," said he, attempting to take it.

"Let me go, I say," she cried.

"Give me a kiss, and I will," and he again repeated the attempt.

"Never," she exclaimed; trying in vain to force herself from him.

"Then I will take it," said the wretch, and

by superior strength he at last succeeded, although Margaret had flown to her mistress's assistance, and was doing all she could to prevent it. "I have got it," he added, with an air of triumph.

"Hardened monster," said Isabel. "Is it not enough that you should have violated the laws of hospitality; must you dare to insult a helpless woman, who has already been used with so much cruelty by you. By a second attempt to murder the innocent Albert, you wounded my father: you have destroyed the peace of my family, and you are not yet satisfied; what more do you intend doing?"

"Bring you to your senses, young lady," said the murderer; "I have more ways than one; you shall see me by and bye; for the present, farewell. Barbara, mind the girls."

"Aye, aye," replied Barbara, as her master left the room, "I understand you; leave that to me, Sir, leave that to me. Now my dear, you must behave better: remember our master's a great man. You are here under his protection, and you must have a care not to displease him."

"Go away, old woman," said Margaret; "we can do very well without you. Your master may want your company; go to him."

"Not till I please," said the vexed woman; "for the present I am mistress in this castle, and can have things as I will. As for you, young girl, you must prepare for keeping *company* with the gentleman that carried up your mistress. He has business with you."

"I will never leave my mistress," said Margaret firmly.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared the woman; "you seem to know much about the ways of our castle. Well, well, it does not matter; I dare say you will make it all out in time."

"Go away," repeated Margaret; "my mistress is ill, and needs rest. "I beseech of you to let us alone; you will oblige us very much."

"This is speaking something like," said the woman; "considering the much I have to do, you *shall* be left alone for a little while, only promise to behave better to master another time."

Isabel gave no answer to this appeal, and

heard with infinite pleasure the door fastened again.

The release was indeed necessary to Isabel, for she was so exhausted by her contest with the unprincipled Morbiere, that she could with difficulty stand upon her legs. But it was no time for rest, as the insecurity of her situation, and the imminent perils to which she was exposed, rendered watchfulness indispensable, and demanded the efforts of a wakeful mind, to shelter her from the storm which hovered over her devoted head.

Barbara was later with supper than she had been the night before, and when she made her appearance she apologised on the score of having been employed about her master's affairs.

She sat the tray down, and approached Margaret; "You are to come with me," said she; "our master has appointed you another room."

"She shall not go," said Isabel.

"Our master's orders must be obeyed," said the old woman; "or else there will be rare work."

"She shall not go," repeated Isabel.

"You must follow me," said Barbara.

"I will not stir," said Margaret.

"Don't be foolish, girl," said the woman; going round the table as with an intention to take Margaret's arm, and lead her by force from the room.

"I will not follow you," said she; "I am determined to stay with my mistress."

"Very well, very well," said Barbara; "I will carry word to my master of what you say." And she left the room, taking as before the precaution of locking and bolting the door.

The woman's message gave fresh grounds for deliberation, which continued until the door was again opened. But, what was the terror of Isabel and her maid, when instead of Barbara, they beheld the Marquis's accomplice Carl. This was indeed a moment of trial; they trembled convulsively, and kept their eyes fixed upon the wretch before them. Barbara came in immediately after, and approached Margaret.

'Our master sends us again for you," said

the woman; addressing herself to the maid. "Come, you have given me trouble enough."

Margaret clung to her mistress, who locked her closely in her arms.

"This is not the time for play," said Carl; "you must go with me."

"I will rather die," exclaimed Margaret.

"Nonsense," said the man; "girls do not have their own way here; I'll serve you as I served to'ther wench there," pointing at Isabel; "come along, I don't like waiting; come I say. Here, old bone-sucker, help me off with the girl."

"Yes, yes," said the woman; seemingly well pleased with the request. "I'll help you. Now dear, come with us."

"Keep off," exclaimed Isabel.

"Keep quiet," said Carl.

A most shameful scene followed; Carl and the woman began pulling Margaret away by main force, in defiance of the threats, prayers, entreaties, and screams of the distracted Isabel, who resisted most heroically the repeated attempts

which were made to tear her from her. At last nature gave up the contest, and she fainted.

The opportunity was immediately seized, and the unfortunate girl was dragged out of the room, rending the air with her cries, and weeping most piteously. But the wretches who bore her away were dead to all feeling, and she was carried to the distant apartment prepared to receive her.

Fearing that her other captive might avail herself of the opportunity of the open door, to attempt her escape, although it would have been quite impossible for her to succeed; Barbara returned to the room, and found her in the same deplorable state as she had left her. The freshness of the air, which blew through the long gallery did more towards her recovery than whatever the old woman could imagine; and she at length awoke to a full sense of her misery. In vain she called her Margaret, in vain she begged to have her restored to her; the only reply she got was a loud laugh from

Barbara, who exhibited the inmost recesses of her toothless mouth, in her bursts of fiendish exultation.

"What; you thought to have your own way, did you? I told you what would happen; but you would not listen to me. Perhaps you took me for an old fool."

Isabel was silent; for she knew that all were deaf to her intreaties, and resigned herself to her Maker, as the only being who could save her from her enemies. The impression of her mind was mistaken by Barbara, who feared she was meditating something against her, and hastened to take away the untouched meal, and fastened the ponderous door, of which the well-known strength as effectually secured her from danger, as it defied all the powers of the prisoner to escape.

When Isabel was left to herself, with one solitary taper which glimmered its pale light through the dark apartment, she fell upon her knees, and sought consolation and strength in the effusions of a pious heart. She prayed

fervently, and implored the Almighty to save her from the snares that encompassed her, and from the wretch whose views were bent upon rendering her despicable to her sex, and to herself.

When she had done praying she began barricading the door, with the tables, chairs, and every thing that was moveable in the room. She fancied this precaution would secure her from the Marquis de Morbiere's designs.

Having completed her prudent arrangements, she got to bed, but without extinguishing the taper.

Several times she was frightened by the sound of footsteps, and by noises which resembled attempts to open a door: the sound came not from the only one she had ever been able to discover in the room, but in a direction near the head of her bed. She listened, but all was quiet. A little while after, she heard the sound again. The coldness of death came upon her, and her tears, (which had flown without intermission from the moment of her discovering the loss of Margaret) ran in

streams down her pale and languid cheeks, and felt like so much burning liquid trickling down the frozen snow.

Persuaded that there was but one door, and that it was so secured by what she had put against it that it could not be opened without considerable exertion and noise, she fancied that what she heard must have been occasioned by rats. The conclusion was so natural that her fears would in great measure have vanished had she not heard the same strange noise again. She no longer hesitated, but dressed herself, and taking her dagger with her, got into bed and listened attentively.

The noises which had been repeated at long intervals, now became oftener heard, and at last she plainly distinguished one of the oaken panels slide gradually into the adjoining wainscot. She then perceived a hand, and in an instant more, the tall figure of the Marquis de Morbiere, wrapped up in a morning gown. She would have called out, but so great was her terror that she could not articulate a single sound; her tears instantly dried up, but the

prevailing coldness increased, and she sat up, inanimate as marble, with her eyes fixed upon the detested object, who listened for a moment, as if terrified by the tread of his own foot, and as if wishing to discover whether his victim was asleep. With the cautious and light step of a tiger which marks its prey, he advanced towards the bed, undrew the side curtain, and beheld the stern, the accusing, the beautiful Isabel.

Had he seen the spirit of the murdered Montfort or of the no less hapless Count de Barsas, the unworthy man could not have started back more suddenly. But his impudence, which overcame every difficulty, and his crimes which hardened his soul to every feeling of remorse, gave him courage, and he again drew near the bed.

Isabel's indignation instantly turned the coldness with which she had at first been seized, to the warm glow of resentment, and she exclaimed, "What brings you here, Sir?"

"Love, Isabel! my love for you brings me to your bedside."

" Leave the room, Sir;" she exclaimed.

" No, Isabel," said he; attempting to take her hand. " You shall not be so cruel to me."

" Go, Sir;" she again cried.

" I will not," said he. " My determination is fixed, resistance is useless; you had therefore better change your tone. I *will* be loved by you."

" Insult me not with your vain expressions of an affection which you never felt; go, Sir; I command you; leave me to my wretchedness and aggravate it not."

" You are too petulant," said he; as if he wished to soothe her: " You know, my love, my adored Isabel, you know that I live for no other object than yourself, do not kill me with your unkindness."

" Cease, deceitful wretch," exclaimed the virtuous girl. " Your character, your views, and your crimes are known to me; you are capable of nothing but baseness."

" You wrong me, Isabel," said he.

" Presume not to call me by that name, Sir,'

she exclaimed. "Such familiarities ill become you. I again command you to leave the room."

"No, my love," said he; "I do not mean to leave you to-night, I can be very happy with you." And as he he spake the words he sprung upon the bed.

"Away, vile wretch," exclaimed Isabel; "or by the God that made me I will bury this dagger in your heart;—keep off!" At the same time she held up the dagger, and the Marquis fearing for his life leaped off the bed, Isabel did the same on the other side, still grasping the dreadful weapon and determined to take his life, rather than lose her honour.

"Put down that dagger," exclaimed the Marquis.

"No, Sir," said Isabel; "I will not."

"I will compel you to it," said he; "give it me, Isabel."

"I will not," she replied; "it is the only protection I have, and will keep it."

"Trust to my honour, and give me the dagger," repeated the Marquis.

" I again tell you, I will not," said she, " and if you come near me I will bury it in your breast."

" I will get assistance, and take it from you," exclaimed the wretch, in a tone of violent rage.

" In that case," said Isabel, calmly, " I will bury it in my own heart."

" You are mad," said he ; " and you must be treated as a maniac."

" I am virtuous," she exclaimed ; " and I will preserve my virtue. I repeat it, Sir, if you make another attempt as you did just now, and if you offer me violence, I swear by the Virgin Mary, to kill you, and if I fail in the attempt, to kill myself. No one shall take this weapon from me whilst I have life to use it."

" My people are gone to rest," said the Marquis; " or I would put your courage to the test. For this night I will leave you to think of your conduct, and to prepare for worse treatment than you ever experienced,

should you remain headstrong and silly as you are;—good night."

He was so terrified by Isabel's desperate courage, that his heart failed him, and he thought it best to postpone his outrage until he should be able to find her off her guard.

The moment the Marquis left her, and closed the sliding panel by which he had entered, she began to reconsider her situation and think what she could do to prevent his coming in again. She drew near the wainscot and examined the sliding door with her faint taper. It fitted so exactly and was so nicely contrived that when she searched she could with difficulty ascertain whether it was really the one by which he entered or whether in the moment of terror she had mistaken it. Upon minute examination, however, she observed that the dust which was thickly accumulated on the other panels, was rubbed off on this, and bore signs of having been grazed against something which fitted it so closely as to leave an

impression. Having made this discovery, her next anxiety was, how to fasten the door, but she was soon relieved from it by the trusty dagger, with which she began the tedious operation of boring a hole, intending to secure the point of it into the panel, and against the adjoining wainscot, so as effectually to prevent the possibility of its being pushed back.

Isabel had nearly completed her laborious undertaking, when the door against which she had set the chairs and tables, burst open with a tremendous crash, and the spectre of Philip de Montfort stood beneath the threshold.

She uttered a loud and piercing scream as she beheld the fearful apparition, and almost sunk senseless on the floor; but the efforts of despairing virtue, which had given her so much courage to resist the unprincipled murderers, did not forsake her at this awful moment, and she stood in mute wonder and terror gazing at the spirit. The friendly taper which had partly been instrumental in saving her from destruction, was still grasped within her hand, and its light reflected upon the spectre's ar-

mour, as ten thousand stars upon the face of a polished mirror.

Resigned to heaven's will, without an offence to answer for, with a pure and unblemished soul, Isabel stood and did not remove her eyes from the object before her.

The spirit beckoned to her to approach—but she dared not move. It beckoned again—and she made a step towards it. Once more it beckoned, and glided slowly down the long gallery, turning round at each stride and beckoning again to her to follow. Fearing death less than dishonour, and capable of every exertion to escape from the hands of her oppressor, she made a desperate effort to overcome the weak timidity of human nature, and followed; still holding the taper, and guarding it with her right hand, that it should not be extinguished by the chilling wind which blew through the long and winding gallery.

Her figure was beautifully graceful, and as she stept firmly forward in obedience to the mysterious summons of the armoured spirit, she looked more like a fair form descended

from a better world, than like a mortal being. Her fine long hair hung down to her waist, and blowing back by every gust of air, exhibited a face which lost none of its native loveliness, by terror, illness, and by grief.

The spectre glided on, and Isabel followed; every door was opened, and the chilling breeze of night seemed uninterrupted in its sportive freaks through the various recesses and windings along the passages.

In this manner was she conducted until she reached the postern gate by which Carl had brought her. Like the others, it was open, and no obstacle had presented itself to her progress.

Outside the gate stood a milk-white horse, in warlike trappings. There was no one with the noble beast; it stood alone.

The spectre halted and beckoned her to approach; encouraged by the hope of deliverance, she obeyed, and drew near; the spectre then made signs for her to mount; she threw away her taper, and did as she was bid. The horse stood perfectly still, and Isabel looked about

her, to see whether there was any other steed near, or any one to guide her; but no!——It was otherwise ordained. The spirit waved its hand, and the horse went off at full speed. When she had proceeded a few lengths Isabel looked round for the ghost, but it had vanished.

Thought upon thought now crowded upon her mind, and her escape appeared to her as nothing less than the ever-watchful hand of Providence, which had directed an angel to deliver her from the snares of her enemies, and from impending death.

CHAPTER XIII.

The high-mettled charger upon which Isabel was mounted, continued without breaking from its speed, and snorted as it went, as if to illuminate by the breath of its fiery nostrils the dark and intricate space which it traversed. The moon was rising, but overcast with deep black clouds; all was dreary, and she could nowhere recognise any familiar object by which she might judge of the land on which she moved.

The motion of the horse was so easy that had she been carried by an experienced skaiter upon the smooth face of a frozen lake, she could not have felt less inconvenience, or so little fatigued, as by the steady and long-strided gallop of the milk-white steed.

So fearful was she of pursuit that she made no attempt to check the noble animal, but

patted its sleek neck, and trusted for safety to the fate which had delivered her.

As day began to break she thought she recognised some places which had in happier days been familiar to her, and as she rode on she became more certain that she was not many miles distant from the castle of Barsas. Her anxiety now increased; her doubts, her fears, her love, her escape, all crowded in disordered succession upon her afflicted and careworn mind. The stream of soothing tears which had so long eased her heaving bosom, ceased to flow; her eyes burned with consuming fire; her lips were parched; the heavy sight could find no outlet from her too-full heart.

Can the mariner describe his fears when, washed from a sunken wreck, he is driven upon a friendless rock, o'er which each rolling billow runs its frantic race, carrying away every resisting obstacle, and sometimes leaving a lifeless corpse extended upon the craggy stone, which, as if jealous of its prey, it returns and carries off to the inmost recesses of the deep?

—And, can the captive who thinks to die by the hand of the bloody buccaneer, find words to tell the feelings of his heart, when, by the interference of a more merciful being, his life is spared, and he restored to liberty?

It must be the task of such whose pens can paint these feelings in all the lively colours of life, to describe what Isabel felt, when from a height she beheld the lofty embattled towers of the castle of her forefathers, to which she was already so nearly restored, by an event of which she could not think without reverence and gratitude.

Suddenly the horse turned off and took a short cut towards the castle of Montfort, then turned again, and rushed through the forest, until it came to a steep stony place, round which it made a rapid turn, and halted before the entrance of the well-known and far-famed cavern of death. For a moment she sat in silent expectation of being carried on; but the horse, as if anxious to avoid the pale gleams of the rising sun, pawed the ground, and made her understand that she was to dismount. She

patted its neck to express all that she could have wished to make it comprehend; thrice kissed its flowing mane, and dismounted. The horse instantly gave a loud neigh, and darted into the dark cavern. The sound of hoofs was clearly heard to re-echo down the vaulted space, but it became more faint and faint, until it resembled the rumbling of distant thunder, and stole away from human ear.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Isabel, who almost lost the remembrance of her situation, by the awful astonishment with which she was filled, "Wonderful mysteries!"

Recovering herself she began to consider what she should do in her deplorable situation, and how she could gain admittance into the castle at that early hour. She was cold and shivering, for she had travelled without any thing upon her head, and with nothing but a thin dress which she had worn the preceding day, and put on again when she was alarmed by the Marquis de Morbiere's attempt to open the sliding panel.

This was no time for long deliberation: the

sun was rising, the face of nature began to be gilt with his resplendent rays, and the least delay would subject her to the gaze of the labourers coming to their morning work.

Isabel fell upon her knees, and, with uplifted hands, poured forth the effusions of a grateful heart for the mercy which had been shown her. Having paid her religious homage, she rose and bent her steps towards the castle of Barsas. It was with difficulty she could stand, for her legs were swollen with fatigue, and she was so weak as to be almost unable to proceed.

By dint of exertion she managed to creep on, faultering as she went, and despairing of ever reaching the haven of her hopes. She had proceeded about half way when nature gave up the task, and she sat herself disconsolately down upon the trunk of a newly felled tree, and melted into a flood of tears. She sobbed aloud. Suddenly she was startled by a voice by her side, which said, in accents of true compassion, "Weep on, fair lady, weep on; and may heaven bring you comfort; tears

will run when the heart is full; the soul will mourn when sorrow's near. Weep, fair Lady Isabel."

"Is it you, my good old man?" said she, turning to see who could speak thus to her, and recognizing the wood-cutter.

"Yes, lady, yes! Even I, who saw you ere you could lisp your own dear name; who saw you grow up kind and lovely, and who see you come to this. Oh! dearest lady, you are not the only one that weeps, other tears flow fast with yours. But tell me, how came you here; who took you away?—who brought you back? Stop! answer not as yet; come to my homely cottage, and warm yourself. The morning is too cold for you, and you have nothing to defend you from it."

"I must go on to the castle," said Isabel.

"Nay, not so, fair lady," resumed the wood-cutter, making an attempt to raise her up; "the castle is not fit for you at this early hour. Come with me, lady; it will not be the first time that you have warmed your dear hands by

our crackling chump: Come, Madam, I beseech you, grant a poor man's prayer."

Isabel could no longer resist, and finding herself too weak to walk alone, she took the good man's arm, and walked slowly towards his humble cottage.

Nothing could equal the astonishment of his wife and family when Isabel appeared; they could not imagine how she came at such an early hour to be met by the wood-cutter. She was courteously received, however, and some plain but wholesome food was immediately laid before her upon a napkin, which, though of ordinary material, could in whiteness have defied the driven snow.

She was too much care-worn and fatigued to eat; and it was but after long and repeated entreaties that the old man and his wife prevailed upon her to take something; at length she took a little warm milk and a small piece of bread, which partly dispelled the cold chills which had come upon her since she dismounted from the mysterious charger.

"How does our dear lady feel now?" said the honest housewife.

"Very poorly," replied Isabel, bursting into tears.

"Do not cry, dear lady," said the woman.

"Check not her tears," interrupted the wood-cutter. "Weep on, dear young lady; for tears will ease your heart and help you well again. Tell me, Madam, I pray you tell me, how came you to be lost; how came you back again? There are so many strange tales about, that no one knows what to think: (not that any one thinks you have acted improperly, but because some honest folk bear all the blame.) If I'm not too bold, I would like to know; indeed I would, dear lady."

"It's a long story, my honest friend," said Isabel; "I have not strength to tell you now."

"Tell me one thing then," repeated the anxious man; "Did that good gentleman, Albert de la Lance, carry you off, as your mother seems to think?"

"No!" exclaimed Isabel, "he is too honourable; it was the Marquis de Morbiere."

"Yes, yes," said the wood-cutter, shaking his head, "so your poor father said with his dying breath."

"My father!" she exclaimed in a voice of terror, "my father; what! is my poor father dead?"

The wood-cutter would have said the heart-rending "*yes*," but she swooned away, and fell back into the arms of his wife, who, seeing her countenance change, rushed forward and saved her from falling upon the ground.

An active youth, the wood-cutter's son, was instantly despatched to the castle to call Robert; for the old man knew how things were going on, and that he could depend upon assistance from no one else. He directed the lad to give his errand to none but Robert, and to desire him to come without mentioning to any one where he was going. The youthful messenger was starting, when he called him back, and bid him say that he himself was very ill and wished to see him without delay.

The wood-cutter, in his humble way of life,

knew much of the ways of the world, and inwardly thought that the news of Isabel's being at his cottage might prejudice some great people against him, and prove a serious evil to his family; he thought besides that indelicate inferences might be drawn, and that she might be suspected of having run away instead of having been carried off.

Whilst the boy was gone, the old woman did all she could think of to restore Isabel to herself; but every effort was vain, and violent hysterical convulsions followed every attempt to force liquid into her mouth, or to apply cold water to her temples.

She had been in this state a considerable time when Robert was seen running breathless towards the house. The wood-cutter feared the sudden meeting might be too much for him, and went out to him.

"The boy told me you were very ill," said Robert, coming up to him.

"Yes, Sir," answered the old man, "I sent you word so; but I wished you to see a sick person in my cottage."

"Why did you not send for the Doctor instead of me?"

"Why, Sir," replied the man, with evident confusion, "it would have been as well perhaps, but I thought the sick lady would rather see you."

"Sick lady?" exclaimed Robert.

"Yes, Sir," replied the man, "a poor dear sick lady; but you must not go in too suddenly, for she is not strong enough to bear the sight of you."

"Tell me," exclaimed Robert, "who is she?"

"The Lady Isabel, Sir," said the man, endeavouring at the same time to stop Robert from rushing into the house; but his effort was unavailing, for in the same instant he was by his sister's side.

He was agonized with grief when he beheld her plight, but her situation required his immediate attention; he began, therefore, applying such remedies as the humble pharmacy of the cottager afforded.

At length she opened her eyes, and beheld

Robert, but it was too much for her, and she swooned a second time.

By dint of affectionate care she again revived, and by looks of tenderness expressed what her feeble tongue had not strength to tell. He fondly pressed her to his bosom, and in the unconnected language of unexpected joy, he endeavoured to convey the feelings of his heart.

By degrees she recovered sufficiently to inquire concerning her unfortunate father. Robert related the sad story as briefly as he could, and they both shed tears of bitter anguish on the loss which they had sustained. After much time spent in, this tribute of filial affection, Isabel satisfied her brother's anxious inquiries, by giving him the particulars of what had happened to her from the hour of her being taken from her father's castle, to her being found by the wood-cutter.

"The story is quite dreadful," said Robert, as soon as she paused. "How had you courage to follow the ghost?"

"I do not know," said Isabel; "I cannot account for it."

"Miraculous deliverance!" exclaimed the wood-cutter. "Did I not tell you what would happen. Yes, yes,—I did. And there's more evil at hand yet. Keep out of the castle, dearest lady, for the wolves are snuffing about, and evil faces, such as I never saw in these parts before, sneek about, as looking for something which they cannot find. Keep away, dear lady. And you, my dear young gentleman, keep her from her enemies."

"It would be best," said Robert.

"It would indeed," said the old woman; "for your friends, who fain would help, will not dare to budge a step; for there's your mother, she believes the bad man good, and the good one bad; and there's the young Count, he thinks worse than her; and there's again, that priest: why, he's no better than he should be. To be sure, the people love you, and will shed their heart's blood for you; but where's the good of that?"

"These good people advise us well," said

Robert to his sister; I would keep you out of the castle for the present, if I knew where to take you.

"Here's our cottage," said the friendly wood-cutter; "its poor enough, the Virgin knows, but take it as it is, and stay twenty years if you will; you shall get the best of all we have."

"Thank you, my good old fellow," said Robert, shaking him by the hand; "I think I can manage better. The Duchess and Susan leave the castle to-day, will you go with them?"

"I would most willingly," she replied; "but shall I not shed a tear upon my poor dear father?"

"No, my adored sister," he exclaimed; "it is not a place for you; there are too many spies about. It would not be safe. Besides, he is to be buried to-morrow; and you are not in a fit state to attend."

"What will my mother think of me?" said Isabel.

"She must not know of your escape, until

you are in safety," he replied. "At present she is too much set against you by Adrien and the worthless priest, to listen to reason; and such are her feelings, that I doubt whether you would be well received. It would be much more prudent to repair to a place of security, and let me seize a favourable opportunity to disclose the business."

"Be it as you will," said she; "I will do whatever you think best."

"Quite right," exclaimed the anxious woodcutter; "I told you so; I knew your brother would think so."

"What can have become of my Margaret?" said Isabel. "I almost blame myself for coming away without her."

"You were perfectly right," said Robert; "it would have been madness to have resisted the spectre's will."

"Yes, indeed," cried the old host; "the will of heaven must be done. Had you not come away, worse things might have come to pass. I see the day when that cursed covering of the wicked, that castle of Morbiere, will lay a heap

of loose stones upon the ground. Old as I am, I shall see the day, and it will happen before I die. Murder can't go long unpunished; can it, Sir? There's a day for all things; there's a day for good, and a day for evil; and as evil's come first, good will follow. There's none but reason in this."

"I dare say not," replied Robert. Then turning to his weeping sister, he asked her whether she would like to see the trusty Dominick. The proposal was a great relief to her mind, and he promised to send him, together with the supply of clothes which she so much needed, and of which she was so destitute.

As soon as he was gone, the good old housewife went into the adjoining room, and having aired her best sheets, she put them into a tidy bed, and returned with an earnest request, that Isabel would take a little rest after the fatigues and terrors of the night. It was with difficulty she prevailed, for she felt no inclination to sleep, although she was dreadfully tired. She did not, however, resist the

woman's entreaties, and having accepted the loan of something to tie about her head, she got between the bed-clothes, and was soon visited by that friend of the afflicted,—sleep.

"I shall now go back to my work," said the old man to his wife, "and may the blessing of heaven be upon her. Poor dear thing, how ill she looks! how worn, how sad!—My old eyes are getting wet, though I've not cried for many a year.—A plague take the man that used her so."

"There will be rare doings at the castle, I trow," said the wife.

"Not a bit," answered her husband, as if he knew beforehand how the news of her escape would be received at the castle; "there will be nothing of the kind, for I dare say, they will rejoice again if they can cut her off of her portion. These great folk understand doing such things, and, whether right or wrong, it makes no odds to some. The richer in wealth the poorer in goodness, as Mister Baba used to say, and he was right; for I warrant you, they will not take her back again. You see, Mo-

ther, things are not ripe yet. There's more in the wind; a deal more than we know; but depend on't, that whilst that ugly, sulky-looking Marquis lives, he will leave her no peace, poor dear thing!"

"They are always the best of people that sorrow comes to," said his wife; "there never was a better lady."

"The better luck," said he; "it will all come right at last, and she will reap her reward."

"I hope she may," replied his wife; "but I doubt it."

"Your doubting won't prevent it," said he; "you never knew me wrong in such matters, and you'll find me right now. The old man's dead, and the young one's in his place, and no good will come of that; but surely he cannot always live, and if he should die, why then comes Master Robert, and he will make as good a Count as any man. I think we shall have some hard blows dealt before we are many years older, and the weakest will go to the wall. That Marquis won't be quiet till he

gets the young lady, and the whole country will be after him if he does."

"What makes you think so?" said his wife.

"Never mind, old woman," he replied; "you an't over wise in these matters, and there's no need you should be. All this talking won't do my work; good bye, take care that nothing amiss happens to our young lady,—God bless her!"

So saying, the rustic prophet left his cottage, and returned to the spot where he had met Isabel, and where he had for some days been employed in felling trees.—Here we will leave him, and return to the Castle de Morbiere.

CHAPTER XIV.

It has already been said, that Margaret was carried by Barbara and Carl to the room prepared for her. There were many reasons for the selection of this chamber in preference to all others: it was distant from Isabel's, and there could be no fear of communication between the two captives, by taking this precaution to keep them apart. In the next place, this room was a kind of passage, or rather a kind of depository, communicating with the subterraneous dungeons, and to defiles which were only known to the criminal few.

Although in appearance there was no communication with any other part of the castle, and that it was situated, as was the apartment in which Isabel was confined, at the end of a long gallery, still was there a passage; but it was so contrived, that no one unaccustomed to open it could discover it from inside the room.

There were many of these secret communications from the inhabited part of the edifice, but they were constructed with peculiar art, and had for a series of years defeated all attempts which the curiosity of the numerous domestics led them to make, in order to ascertain whether the condemned part was in reality solely occupied by owls and rats.

Early on that morning Baba had heard, from the mouth of the afflicted Dominick, the history of what had happened to Isabel and his daughter. The jester's nerves were not over strong, and he gave way to the greatest grief for the loss which he had sustained. He returned to his own room, where he threw himself upon his bed, and bemoaned his fate in accents which would have melted the coldest heart.

In this situation was he found by the servant who came to summon him to attend his master. A sobbing, "Very well," was all the answer he gave; and it turned out fortunately; for had he made the least comment, the Marquis would have been informed of it, and he would have become at once an object of hatred and

of suspicion. He arose, and made the necessary preparations; after which he joined his master, and left the castle with him.

Baba's impression of the whole affair may be easily conceived, when it is recollected what he overheard between the double doors. Of his master's guilt he had too many proofs to harbour the shadow of a doubt of his being the perpetrator of the desperate offence which had been committed, and of the murder of the Count de Barsas. The assassination of some one was of course intended, and it was truly unfortunate that the Count should have been the person to suffer. His own dishonourable intentions, and the shameful expedition upon which he was beset, deserved punishment, but not from the hand of a murderer; and the mistake did not in the least degree lessen the enormity of the Marquis's guilt.

Baba had no doubt of Margaret's being at the Castle of Morbiere, and he secretly determined to leave no stone unturned for her recovery.

On the road he pretended to be full of glee,

and so thoroughly deceived his master with his foolery, that he did not even fancy himself suspected, and gave Baba credit for being of all his household the man that entertained the best opinion of him.

The Marquis was received on his return with every demonstration of respect, and some appearances of pleasure, both of which were the effects of selfish policy, and void of sincerity; for he was universally disliked.

Baba now disguised his grief, and putting on the face which best suited his office, in order to avoid suspicion, began a system of *espionage,* which rendered it highly probable that he would make some discovery tending to give a clue to the fate of his loved Margaret, and of Isabel, towards whom he had always entertained the greatest respect and devotion.

He saw a something lurking in his master's looks, an anxiety to avoid the inquiring eye of his attendants, which roused his vigilance, and he followed as closely as possible all his steps and watched every thing he did.

At an early hour the Marquis dismissed him, and he immediately began a diligent search of all the apartments in the inhabited part of the castle, of the offices, and of such places as he fancied there might exist a communication with the other part.

To a determined man few obstacles are insurmountable, and it happened so to Baba; for, by dint of search, by close examination of every door, passage, room, hole, closet, and crevice, he came to a dark narrow staircase, which led him up a long flight of steps into a large empty chamber, from the window of which he discovered that he had passed the boundaries of the inhabited court, and was really in the reputed forsaken part of the castle. Here the remembrance of the ghost, and of the visit related to him by Dominick, came across his mind, and he began seriously to consider whether he should or should not proceed. The expedition was dangerous, and might be fatal to him; but love got the better of fear, and he started afresh, determined not to be frightened, and to rise above the natural

timidity of his nature. This was no small effort.

Upon further search he discovered that the other apartments must lay in a different direction, and retraced his way by the staircase by which he had ascended. At the foot of it he found a second narrow passage, which in the gloomy reflection of a small lantern which he carried, had escaped him. By this passage he proceeded along and came to a range of vaults, which he carefully examined without making any discovery which could assist him in his peregrination. He halted several times in hopes to hear the well-known sound of his Margaret's voice, but the farther he went, the more distant he seemed to be from the object of his wishes. At length he came to some dungeons, of which the doors were open; he entered and again examined; but what was his horror when in one of them he discovered the body of a female, not yet entirely decayed, lying with the face upwards, on a stone bench, and fastened by an iron hoop about her waist, from which a short chain was firmly rivetted

in the ponderous stone. He shuddered, and sickened as he beheld the unfortunate creature. The story of the girl who had been starved to death rushed upon his agitated mind, and he had no doubt but that this was her body. The flesh was fast wasting off the bones; the hair hung dishevelled in long and ample locks; one arm was stretched by her side, the other hung down towards the ground. The slender dress with which the corpse was clad appeared much torn, and as in many places stained with blood. The feet were bare upon the cold stony bench.

At some distance was a small table upon which stood a pitcher of water, which stunk infectiously; and next to it a loaf of bread, which had become the prey of worms and of must: there was no appearance of its having been touched. Baba closely examined every part of this dreadful cell, and with his eye measured the distance of the table from the bench, which was clearly too great to allow the possibility of the unhappy female's reaching the scanty food placed before her. He con-

cluded, therefore, that the story of her having been starved to death was true; at all events, had she not died with hunger, she could not long have existed in the piercing cold which reigned in the dungeon, with the little air which could have been admitted through a small grating in the door, and in the state to which she had been reduced, having scarcely any clothing on, and destitute of shoes or any thing to guard her from the severity of cold. Her only bed, a block of stone; her only covering, the slender dress in which she had been carried to this place of torture.

Baba tried to form some idea of her features by a close examination of the face, but it was too much disfigured; a fine set of teeth, of which the snowy lustre reflected the feeble rays of his lantern, proved that they must have belonged to a lovely mouth; and her body was not so decayed, but that it still bore traces of a beautiful person.

So moved was he with pity, that he with difficulty tore himself from the scene which

had excited so much horror, and he turned away to continue his search. As he left the cell, he examined the small but ponderous door, and found a bunch of rusted keys hanging from the lock.—These he secured, and proceeded on. He examined two more dungeons, in both of which he found human bones; but they seemed of later date, and he was so bent upon his expedition, and his feelings so harrowed up with the dread of Margaret's sharing the same fate as the unfortunate unknown, that he lost as little time as possible in dwelling upon what he saw.

Along this range of cells he could discover no opening, but came to a small door which stood upon a stone step and led him to think it must be the foot of the staircase. He tried to pull it open by a large iron ring which was fastened to it, but it resisted his efforts, and he began trying some of the keys which he had found. After many fruitless trials one of them opened the lock, and he discovered, as he had imagined, a narrow stone staircase, by which, after pulling the door to, he ascended into a

small room, from which there was another staircase of which the door was open. Up these steps he again ascended, and came to a small suit of rooms; in one of these he found a ladder placed against a trap-door in the roof. He had now proceeded so far that he dreaded ever being able to trace his way back should he attempt any further search, and was returning with an almost broken heart, when he distinctly heard the sound of a human voice, as if proceeding from a place near where he stood. He listened, but the sound was lost, and he fancied it was only the effect of his nervous agitation which had produced an imaginary noise; but he heard the sound again, and recognised the voice of his lost love. He instantly forgot all he had seen, and listened attentively to mark the quarter from whene it came. He fancied it proceeded from the room above, and mounted to the top of the ladder. Here he again listened, and could plainly distinguish the language of complaint, and concluded Margaret must be alone, since he heard no voice but hers.

He undrew the bolts which kept down the trap door, making as little noise as possible, and having raised it up with his hand, he called Margaret by her name.

"Who calls me?" exclaimed the affrighted girl.

"'Tis I, Margaret;—your own Baba;" and he raised the trap high enough to show his head.

"Are you come to save me?" said she, stooping down to him.

"Yes, dear," he replied.

"Take me then, for God's sake," she exclaimed, "or I shall be murdered."

"Have courage to come down here," said he.

"Yes! any where to save myself from these wretches," replied the terrified maid. "Oh! Baba, have pity upon me, and save me."

"Come," said the jester, at the same time raising up the trap, "come down after me."

Margaret did as she was directed, and with faltering steps descended after him. He caught her in his arms and embraced her with all the tenderness of unaffected love, then remounted

the ladder, and again fastened the trap door, so as to prevent the possibility of pursuit.

Margaret could not proceed further without making inquiries for her mistress, to whom she wished to be reconducted, but finding that her lover could give her no information she was compelled to submit to fate and follow him.

In their passage along the cold and dreary vaults which Baba had traversed, they proceeded in total silence and trod as lightly as possible. They came at last to a place where he had before found two passages, but he could in no way remember which of them he had come by. In this painful state of uncertainty he determined, after a moment's whispering consultation, to try the one leading to the right, from which at certain distances other passages branched off. He thought the most prudent plan was to proceed to the end of the one along which they were hastening, and Margaret observed that she thought they were coming to an opening, as the wind was colder, and seemed to blow more freely. This was evidently not the way by which he had first come, as instead

of steps, they now descended by a gentle declivity.

They soon discovered an open door, leading into a large court which Margaret recognised to be the very one by which she had been brought into the castle.

Having informed Baba of the important circumstances, she pointed out the postern door which led beyond the walls. To their utter astonishment it was open ; they quickly passed it, and Margaret stumbled against something ; it glittered, and she picked up what she immediately recognized to be the taper which had been left for Isabel's use. She likewise saw something white laying at a little distance ; Baba took it up and gave it to her. She closely examined it by the light of the lantern, and knew it to be a handkerchief which she had given her mistress a short time before she was dragged from her room.

These discoveries left no doubt upon her mind that her benefactress had escaped, and Baba joyfully concurred in the opinion.

They concluded that had she been carried to

some other place by the Marquis's order, the doors would have been as carefully shut as when they arrived to them, and as she perfectly remembered Carl's locking them after their entrance into the court, she could not fancy them open for any other cause, and attributed her escape to Fortmain, upon whose fidelity she knew her mistress could trust, and of whose good will she had not the shadow of a doubt. Although Margaret had very naturally hit upon the wrong author of Isabel's escape, she was right in the main conclusion, and felt the happy consciousness that she had really fled from the snares which encompassed her.

The jester put out the light of his lantern for fear of detection, and led Margaret along the castle wall to the front, from whence some route might be determined for her safety. It was long before they reached the great gates, for the ground was much broken and they were obliged to proceed with great caution, enlarging the circle as they went, lest they should be seen from the watch tower.

On the way Margaret related to her fond deliverer all that had happened at the castle of Barsas, from their leaving it to her escape with him. He was much affected and determined not to remain in the service of the Marquis, however advantageous it might be in point of emolument.

She greatly urged the necessity of his continuing for the present, and until a favourable opportunity should occur to leave his service. He acknowledged the prudence of the measure, and assured her that he would stay if he thought to be enabled by the sacrifice to be of any use to her or to her mistress, in whose welfare he felt as lively an interest as if he had lived all his life in attendance upon her.

He proposed accompanying Margaret to the nearest house or village, seeing her in safety, and obtaining some means of conveyance back to her master's castle; but she positively refused, and insisted on his return.

All her entreaties and representations, all appeals to his affection for her, were necessary to overcome his determination. She at

length prevailed, and after mutual assurances of unalterable affection, and many repeated embraces, Baba obliged her to take what money he had in his pockets for her use upon the road. As she left him he threw his cloak about her, and insisted upon her taking it. She consented, and she required it; for her clothes were not calculated to keep out the cold air of night, and the rain which the thickening clouds seemed to promise, but which did not fall during the night.

Many times they parted, and as many times they returned into each other's arms. The jester's warm heart was not proof to scenes like these, and Margaret was no less affected. They wept upon each other's bosoms, and said a thousand tender things; but time passed quickly on, in oft' repeated tales of love; and not to fall a second time into the hands of the castle ruffians, it was necessary to bid a final adieu.

The poor girl made a spirited effort to overcome the feelings of her heart, and tore herself from the trembling arms of her agonised

lover. Again she bid him farewell, and repeated it o'er and o'er until the sound could no more be heard.

Baba stood with his arms crossed upon his chest, and was at a loss how to act. He would have followed her, but he had given his word; and he turned towards the castle, intending to go in at the large gates, and return to his apartment.

As he walked along, he remembered a part of the wall at some distance from the gates by which he had once in a sporting freak climbed over by means of the buttresses; to this he repaired, and after much exertion he succeeded in regaining his apartment without being seen by any one. It turned out very fortunately, as particular notice was usually taken of this faulty part of the wall, which had often been ordered to be repaired, but which had by the negligence of the work-people, or of the Senechal, been left in its present unsafe state.

CHAPTER XV.

Baba pointed out the road with so much care and minuteness, that Margaret found little difficulty in proceeding, although totally unacquainted with the country which she thus traversed in the character of an anxious fugitive. Accustomed to live away from towns, and to wander amidst the woody forests and the fens, she had none of those fears which would have tortured her, had her life been otherwise spent. Her situation was nevertheless most pitiable, and if she feared not the hungry wolf, and the shades of night, she was rendered truly miserable by the dangers of her situation, and the constant peril in which she must be, until once more restored to her family and friends.

A man may escape, and screen himself from pursuit in a thousand various ways; but what can a helpless female do? Every difficulty which the former may have to encounter, is doubled

to the latter; for she has not only the tyranny of man to fear, but also his vices, and the proneness of the unprincipled to avail themselves of every opportunity to deceive, mislead, and lose the hapless maid who may chance to ask her way, or to seek assistance.

Had she been free from these terrors, Margaret's mind would have been comparatively happy, at least she would have proceeded with more spirit and not have trembled at every rustling tree which sounded like the foot of man. She walked on, however, and looked out in momentary expectation of seeing some house or cottage in which she might seek refuge for the remainder of the eventful night. She was indeed in the right track, but the distance was greater than Baba thought, and quite exhausted in mind and body, she sat down at the foot of a tree, and sunk into a sound sleep, forgetting at once her terrors and her danger.

When she awoke sne started up and looked about her, scarce roused from her slumber, and so tired that she would gladly have laid her

head again upon the cold turf, and have slept till sun-rise. At first she could not think how she came there, but she soon recollected herself and once more resumed her adventurous task.

It was broad daylight before she perceived the habitation which she sought, and increased her speed as much as possible, to reach it.

It was a neat cottage, and bespoke its inhabitants to be in easy circumstances, not that it bore any appearance of wealth, or of belonging to people above the better class of labourers. From several implements of agriculture and some poultry about the house, Margaret judged that they must be small farmers; and as she came nearer she perceived a good-looking young man harnessing a horse to go to plough. This man she fancied must be the master; and she was not mistaken.

The house was but one story high; the windows were of the usual size and glazed with diamond panes of glass, of greenish hue, but so clean as to reflect the rays of the morning sun in all its resplendent beauty. It was

thatched, and its fair white walls were covered on every side, with jessamine, woodbine, and roses, trailed up to the roof.

As Margaret was musing upon the peaceful cottage, and bending her wearied steps towards it, she caught the eye of the farmer, and the strangeness of her appearance, which bore the stamp of better times, and of her countenance, which bespoke the sorrow of her mind, excited his curiosity and induced him to come forward.

For the first time in her life, the poor girl saw herself reduced to seek assistance from strangers; and the idea so distressed her that she was nearly turning away from the house; but he called to her, and asked whether she had lost her way. She replied that she was travelling towards the castle of Barsas.

"You are tired," said the farmer; "come into our house and rest yourself."

"Thank you," said Margaret; "I am indeed very tired."

He led the way and she followed. As she entered the cottage, she was met by a fine

young woman, barely passed her teens, who carried in her arms a blooming infant, and was followed by a fine rosy-cheeked boy about two years of age. She bade the traveller welcome, and took her to the large open fire-place, where she handed her a chair and desired her to be seated.

"This young lady seems to have lost her way, my love," said the young man to his wife. "She looks ill; cannot you give her something?"

"I have not lost my way," said the blushing Margaret; "I am returning to my master's castle."

"Your master's castle!" said the surprised man; "how is it that you are travelling there on foot, and in such a state; pray has any thing happened to you?"

She burst into tears; and although the good housewife was burning to know her adventure, she respected the laws of hospitality, and said to her husband, "We must not distress the young lady, by forcing her secret from her."

"I have no secret," said the sobbing girl; "I have just escaped from the castle of Morbiere."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the farmer; "what, more infamy going on there?"

Margaret began telling her story in the unaffected language of truth and modest simplicity, but the worthy cottagers would not allow her to proceed, until she should have rested herself, and taken some refreshment. She needed both, for she was faint and languid, and as she spoke, the feverish dryness which prevailed upon her lips, showed that she was not equal to tell the story which they wished so much to hear.

The farmer reminded his wife of his being wanted in the fields, and after many repeated requests that Margaret would not leave the house before his return, he bound them both to a promise of not telling her story till after dinner, when he could give it all his attention.

Margaret readily promised compliance; not

so his wife; for she loved to hear strange stories, and would have given any thing to know the sad tale of the youthful fugitive.

Meanwhile she ministered to her wants, and having done it she left her to attend to her household affairs; the weary traveller fell asleep in her chair. The good woman returned, and found her dosing; she would not disturb her, and again left her to herself.

When she awoke, she found the beautiful boy standing against her, with his little arms resting upon her knees and gazing at her, as if to wipe off every stealing tear, and catch each fleeting sigh. A trusty sheep dog sat watching Margaret and the child, as if to guard her in her slumbers, and to defend its infant master.

Sad as she was she smiled upon the fond little fellow, who no sooner saw himself noticed and encouraged, than he bounded upon her lap, and placing his graceful arms about her neck, kissed and fondled her until he saw a tear roll down her fair white cheek, and

hiding his face upon her shoulder, wept with all the bitterness of infant woe.

In consoling the child, she did not improve her own spirits, for the more she tried to soothe, the more she worked up her feelings, and found it impossible to banish her tears, much as she strove and wished to appear more cheerful. Fortunately her efforts were strengthened by the entrance of her hostess, who, followed by a servant girl, came to prepare the table for the humble meal of which the wholesome fumes proclaimed the early arrival. Soon after the farmer returned, and after shaking his guest heartily by the hand, embraced his wife and children as though he had not seen them for a long year.

Surely conjugal and parental affection must grow into unconquerable habit, and become irresistible in its effects, or how is it that people who parted not three hours before, should meet thus tenderly, and seal each other's cheek with a kiss which would frank some people for a month?

There is something in true genuine love, which soars above the common ways of life, and carries, even the humblest of the earth, to superior exstacies, which wealth can never purchase, and which poverty will not destroy.

Transplant the warm-hearted labourer from his family to the glittering palace of royalty; for an hour or two these novel scenes will dazzle his rustic eye, and perhaps delight him; but after the first impression, where will his imagination carry him?—Back to his wife, his children, and his hut, preferring a dry morsel of hard-earned bread, to grandeur and to wealth.

So it is, and heaven be praised; for it makes man contented with his lot, and diffuses those springs of happiness which were equally intended for every rank, and frequently more pure in the middle order than in any.

If one portion of the world seems more favoured than another, it is that to which the peaceful husbandman belongs. Within a walk of his house all his pursuits in life are concentrated. His time is sufficiently employed,

and never hangs upon him; his wants are few, his cares still fewer. His ambition extends not beyond a favourable harvest. No dangerous speculation engrosses his attention; change of fashions, and fancies of the times, have no influence upon his pursuits. His people are obedient to him, and he shares with them the labours of the day. He sees nature in all its pristine beauty; each returning season has its charm, and to the husbandman every day has its interest. Each period of his toils is marked with joy, for he returns to his home, where, by the hand of a careful wife, he finds his ready meal, to which he sits without a sorrow, and surrounded with smiles.

"How happy could I be of a life like this," said Margaret to herself; "had I dwelt in a cottage, how many miseries would I not have been saved!" With such thoughts as these she would have remained absorbed in meditation, had not the farmer called her attention to the well-filled plate before her.

Margaret was not hungry, yet the hearty appetite with which her hosts took their meal,

and their continual entreaties that she would do the same, made her eat much more than she would have done, had she been left to choose for herself.

After dinner the farmer desired chairs might be drawn round the fire (for though the weather was exceeding warm, he kept up the comfortable custom,) and claimed the promised story from his guest. For so much hospitality she found herself bound to comply, and related as nearly as possible every circumstance that had occurred for the last fortnight.

Her host was no stranger to the events of the tournament, for, with others of his neighbours, he had treated himself with a holiday, and had witnessed the defeat of the Marquis de Morbierc. He expressed himself highly pleased with the result, and praised the brown knight as being the champion of France.

"I would give my grizzle horse to see the fight again," said he; "it was finely done."

"He is the knight to whom my mistress has pledged her faith," said Margaret.

The farmer started with amazement. "The

same!" he exclaimed; "Well then, I wish no better sport than to see him and the Marquis by the ears. He would soon make an end of him."

"He is a gallant knight," said the maid, "and a very unfortunate one."

"'Tis very true," said the farmer; "but he will fight his way the world over, and get into better plight. Good wife, give us a cup of wine to the knight and the lady."

"With all my heart," said his wife: she poured out a cup to each, and they drank the toast.

It was now past noon, and Margaret felt anxious to resume her journey. Her intention gave rise to a long debate; for the hospitable farmers felt so much interest in her, that they would have detained her for some days at least. She expressed her thanks, and assured them, that was she certain of her mistress's fate she would gladly stay. She spoke with so much apparent sincerity, that her kind hosts believed her; and if they consented to her departure, they regretted her the more for being thus

grateful for the little attentions which it had been in their power to show her.

"Saddle your grizzle horse, my dear," said the good woman to her husband; "make haste, saddle him, and take the poor young lady with you; two or three leagues will help her much. Take her to the little inn before you come to the great forest; she may stay there for the night. Perhaps she may want money; do let her have some."

Margaret thanked the generous young woman for her goodness, and produced the money Baba had given her. She was satisfied, and urged her request no more.

Whilst the honest farmer was busied in getting ready the grizzle horse, and adjusting the ample pillion which was to carry the disconsolate traveller, his wife was forcing upon her the acceptance of a fit dress to wear upon the journey. Margaret would by no means lay herself under any further obligation; but resistance was vain, and by main force she was clothed in a manner to insure her from the

chilling air of night, should she be longer upon the road than she expected. She promised to send the clothes back by an early opportunity, and to inform them how things had turned out since her departure from her master's castle, with full particulars of Isabel's and her own return. The promise of returning the dress was little regarded, but that which followed was hailed with joy.

The grizzle horse was not long harnessing; and the moment it was brought round to the front of the house, Margaret sallied forth, taking with her the good wishes and kind farewells of the farmer's wife, who embraced her tenderly as they parted; he then helped her on the pillion, strapped her round, kissed his wife and children, and set off his ready beast at a hand-gallop.

During the journey the farmer made constant inquiries of his fellow-traveller whether she was comfortable, and seeing her eyes filled with tears, exhorted her to keep up her spirits, and not give way to the sorrow

which an unprincipled man had brought upon her. She assured him she grieved little for herself, but that the remembrance of her adored mistress occasioned her sufferings, and that if she could but hear of her being in safety she would be comparatively happy.

The farmer did all he could to soothe her; he represented how much she would injure her health; how she would weaken herself, and how little her tears would contribute to restore her mistress to happiness.

Margaret allowed the truth of what he said, and made many desperate efforts to overcome her emotions; but she might as well have attempted to remove the pyramids of Egypt as to banish tears from her eyes, so long as she remained in suspense on the fate of her benefactress.

Considering that old Grizzle had two upon his back, he made great speed over the ground, and rather increased than lessened it as he drew nearer the Croix-d'Or, the little inn to which they were bound.

The jolly host, a round faced little man,

bearing the emblems of his calling to the very tip of his nose, came skipping to the door, and with all the native vivacity of a French aubergiste, begged to know whether "Monsieur la Bruyère" and "Madame Chose" (bowing very affectedly to Margaret) would not please to alight. The goodly host seeing the farmer prepare to dismount, made a sudden spring at Grizzle's head, to display his great attention to his guests; but Grizzle had been accustomed to more peaceful manners, and in his dislike of so much officiousness turned round, and was within an ace of setting off again on his return home: the farmer had unstrapped Margaret, and she fell, but the aubergiste caught her in his arms, and saved her from injury; she was nevertheless much frightened.

Maître Podevin (the inn-keeper) made a thousand apologies for the little accident which he had occasioned, and excused himself so successfully, that La Bruyère was obliged, in order to spare the man's feelings, to throw the blame upon poor Grizzle, who, unconscious of the charge, began to evince some inclination to

turn into the stable; for he had galloped over three long leagues, and was both weary and hungry. The farmer loved his beast, and saw it provided for; he then returned to his fair companion, and gave orders that she might be accommodated with the best entertainment the Croix d'Or could bestow.

Podevin sat briskly to work, and was much more busy in the room than there was any need of; but in fact he was making work where there was none, to examine his female guest, who appeared somewhat more of a lady than generally stopped at his house. He knew La Bruyère was not a man of the world, nor did he think it probable that he had run away with some *demoiselle de château*, and left his wife to console herself at home. His imagination was wonderfully fertile in conjectures, and mistaking Margaret's wish to hide her weeping eyes for a desire to conceal her face, he concluded that something must be wrong, and that he might perhaps know her by sight. It was not until he had quite worn her out by a thousand " *Madame veut'elle çi, Madame veut'*

elle ça," that he succeeded in obtaining a view of her interesting face. How to account for the redness of her eyes, for her appearance, and particularly for her being with the farmer, who had never before frequented his house with such a companion, he could not tell; and so puzzled and perplexed himself, that he did every thing wrong, and blundered more than he had ever done in his life.

As a married man, the farmer knew what was requisite for the comfort of a female, and gave orders for every thing which he fancied could render Margaret so. The inn-keeper's wife bustled about, put clean linen to her best bed, dusted, and busied herself until every thing arrived at the degree of order and cleanliness, which she thought it her duty to observe towards a guest brought by Monsieur la Bruyère, and so warmly recommended to her best entertainment.

When all these arrangements were completed to the worthy hostess's satisfaction, she conducted Margaret to the room prepared for her, repeatedly inquiring whether there was

any thing wanting which she could add to what she had already provided? She thanked her kindly for her attentions, but assured her she needed nothing more. The woman seemed delighted, and begged her to believe that she was never so happy as when employed in the service of such interesting persons. Margaret could very well have dispensed with a compliment which related more to the sorrow expressed upon her face than to any other *interesting* appearance of which she could boast. She had indeed something peculiarly fascinating about her, and she had by being so many years the companion of her lovely mistress (who took great pains to improve her,) acquired so much of Isabel's graceful and dignified air, that had she taken her seat in the choicest saloon in France, she would have been entitled to admiration, not only for the prettiness of her face, and the well turned proportions of her person, but also for the ornaments of her mind, in the cultivation of which Isabel had bestowed much of her time

Margaret had never associated with servants;

she had therefore avoided the coarseness to which their very employments make them liable. Her mind was pure, and free from the flippant levity so frequently observed in our more modern ladies' maids; and her manners, modelled after a perfect pattern, were lady-like, easy, and of a woman of the world. Good education strengthens natural modesty, as habits of society polish the acquirements of education; but there is great art in knowing how to appreciate these endowments, and in marking out the several stations of those that possess them. Isabel had scrupulously avoided raising her maid too high above her situation; and although she treated her as a friend, loved her as a sister, and bestowed so much of her time upon her, she kept her to her place, and never once did what might (had Margaret been capable of availing herself of the advantage) have given rise, or have sanctioned unwarrantable familiarity.

It cannot be matter of surprise that dame Podevin should have been so much struck with Margaret's appearance, and have entertained

some suspicions that she was upon an expedition which required secrecy, and to which she consequently burned to give publicity; for women love to talk, and from the most ancient of French aubergiste to the present day, they have never been wanting in curiosity, or in chat. She was an indefatigable spokeswoman, and so harassed her poor guest with half-put-questions, and endeavours to make herself acquainted with her history, that she would have made her completely miserable had not the farmer sent word that he wished to see her previous to his return home.

Margaret immediately repaired to the room where he was taking a cup of wine, and began repeating the assurances of her gratitude, which she had already so many times expressed; but he would not listen to her, rather desiring she would inform him of the plans she intended to pursue.

To her request of being provided with a conveyance to continue her journey to the castle, the farmer represented the folly of an undertaking which would lay her up; and as she

could not get the whole of the way before a late hour in the night, she would be exposed to more fatigue than she was able to bear. He concluded with earnest entreaties that she would remain at the inn that night, and proceed early in the morning, when the aubergiste promised to provide for her accommodation. Margaret was obliged to submit, and to the great delight of her hosts, promised to stay at the inn till the next day.

CHAPTER XVI.

This point had been but a few moments settled, when the stable-boy came running breathless into the room to tell his master that he saw some carriages and horses at a distance along the road. Such an event was too uncommon to hear the tidings with indifference, and all, except Margaret, ran out of the house to ascertain the nature of the vehicles which had occasioned the boy's abrupt visit.

The farmer, not less curious than the rest, strained his eyes to see whether he knew to whom the equipages belonged, but he could not discover; and when they had approached a little nearer, he declared himself ignorant of the name of their owners.

Podevin's bustle for Margaret was nothing when compared to the agitation in which the view of the carriages put him. His inn was

the only baiting place for some leagues, and he thought it very likely it might be used for that purpose on the present occasion.

Margaret had hitherto sat in the only parlour the Croix d'Or could boast; the landlady thinking she stood a good chance of wealthier guests, came with all the apparent humility in the world to request as a particular favour, that she would walk into the bar, which she added, "was quite as comfortable as the other room."

Margaret immediately gave up the room, but instead of going into the bar, where a group of very unseemly guests were assembled, she retired to the bed-room, and laying herself down upon the bed, gave way to her poignant grief.—So wretched was she, that she took no notice of the approach of the carriages, which she dreaded to think might belong to the Marquis de Morbiere; but her host's declaration that he knew not who they belonged to, partly quieted her fears, although it did not entirely remove them.

Podevin's expectations were realized, for two

carriages and four drew up at the door, attended with several domestics on horseback, and females in the second carriage. The large stately coaches at the door of a little country inn, looked as grand to the eyes of all the beholders, as they flattered the host's vanity.

Three ladies were let out of the first coach, by half a dozen tall servants in rich liveries; Podevin would have officiated, but he was effectually repulsed, and the crest-fallen aubergiste was compelled to be satisfied with doing the honours of his house.

As the ladies stepped into the inn, Podevin felt his importance revive, and made a thousand of his best bows, with as many fine speeches on the honour conferred upon him, as he conducted them into the room which had been taken from Margaret for their accommodation; who, in her hurry to leave it, forgot to take her things with her, and the taper which she had found at the postern door the night before, of which she had retained possession, and tied up in her handkerchief.

Before we proceed with the events which followed the arrival of the carriages at the Croix d'Or, it will be necessary to carry back our readers to the wood-cutter's cottage, where we left our heroine enjoying a suspension of the sorrows which had so long harassed her, upon the bed prepared for her by the wood-cutter's wife. The relief did not however last any considerable time, for the well-known voice of old Dominick startled her from sleep. The desire of seeing him was naturally great, and she hastened into the room where he and the good woman were talking over the sad thing that had happened within the last few days.

The moment the aged Dominick beheld his dear mistress, he fell upon his knees, and pressing both her hands to his lips, gave vent to the agony of his heart, by a flood of tears, which mingled with those that fell from Isabel's eyes.

Dominick gave her a full account of the sorrows which had been so quickly multiplied at the castle, and heard from his young mis-

tress the narrative of her sufferings and miraculous escape. This part of her history particularly moved the old domestic, and made an impression upon his mind which he said would never be obliterated. The interference of Providence in the saving of a person so dear to him, and the mysterious manner in which her return was effected, brought a fresh gush of tears from him, and he sobbed aloud.

Robert's return checked the running streams, for he brought word to his sister, that the Duchess and Susan almost leaped with joy, when they heard of her safety, and had anticipated his request, by urging the necessity of her absenting herself from the castle until such time as she could return there in perfect safety; and that nothing could make her daughter or herself so happy, as to be accompanied by her to the castle of Briançon. Robert assented to every thing, and accepted for his sister the hospitable refuge which the Duchess's kindness afforded her. Few minutes sufficed for the settling of preliminaries; he despatched Dominick with a bundle of necessaries, an

early hour being fixed upon for the Duchess's departure from the castle.

Ladies being excluded from the ceremony of the Count's funeral, which was not to take place till the next day at midnight, and it being customary for the widow to keep her room for two or three days after the performance of this melancholy duty, the Duchess had, from motives of propriety and delicacy, given orders for leaving the castle, that she should not trespass on the solemnity of the occasion.

From time immemorial it has been the custom in France, and in most parts of the Conti-tinent of Europe, to bury the dead on the third day, unless the faculty declare that there are strong reasons for keeping the body unburied. As there could be no doubt of the Count's being dead beyond the hopes of resuscitation, orders for his inhumation were given soon after his demise, and preparations were carried on as briskly as the nature of the case required. Since the morning the body had (according to custom) been exposed to pub-

lic view, laid out on a kind of state couch, in a room hung with black, filled with large wax lights, and furnished with a highly ornamented altar, at which the priest officiated in his canonicals, and was attended by several *enfans de chœur;* said masses, and sung loud requiems for the repose of the deceased's soul.

The Duchess, with the few ladies remaining at the castle, paid their last respects to the Count in this room of mourning; after which they were expected to shut themselves up in their respective apartments, or return home. For many reasons, the Duchess chose the latter, and her attendants were ordered to get ready early in the forenoon of the day of which we are speaking.

Arrangements being completed, the Duchess, her daughter, and suit, left the castle and proceeded to the part of the road nearest the wood-cutter's habitation, where she had agreed that Robert should bring Isabel to meet her.

The lively affection which mutually existed between the friends, caused Isabel to feel the sincerest pleasure at having this early prospect of again pressing Susan and her mother to her bosom, who themselves looked with no less anxiety to the hour of meeting.

When the Duchess and her daughter, accompanied by their numerous suit, arrived at the place agreed upon, they found Isabel and her brother waiting by the road side, attended by Dominick and the wood-cutter's wife. It was a distressing scene; for when the poor old servant wept aloud and filled the air with his lamentations, the woman sobbed from seeing him so wretched, and although a momentary feeling of happiness shone on Isabel's heart, the impression was but passive, and the remembrance of her sorrows, and parting with Robert, so overpowered her, that she had scarcely strength to enter the coach, and still less courage to turn from the castle.

Robert's repeated warnings of the danger they ran of being discovered, by not proceed-

ing upon their journey, surmounted at last the obstacles which grief opposed; and he tore himself from his sister, the Duchess, and his Susan, with no less difficulty than Isabel did from him.

Robert considered himself the accepted and sanctioned lover of Susan, and the blushing girl, encouraged by her knowledge of her mother's affection for him, instead of striving to conceal her love, acknowledged it with all her native candour, notwithstanding her parent's cheerful pleasantry, and constant assurances that she would never give her consent. But Susan knew better; she had no fears, no peace-destroying suspicions, no cares, except for the sorrows of her friend, and the grief which preyed upon Robert.

When Isabel had taken her seat in the stately coach, the party drove off, and proceeded at a steady pace until they arrived at their baiting place, the Croix d'Or.

When they had been some time in the room which Margaret had vacated, the Duchess

spied the things upon the table in the corner of the room, and wishing to divert her friend's mind from her sorrow, exclaimed—

"What have we here? some damsel has left her things behind her; I suppose our formidable appearance frightened her." Isabel and Susan looked round, and the Duchess proceeded; "Some relics too!—What can this be in the handkerchief?—Something hard.—Let us see."—She opened the handkerchief, and produced the little candlestick and taper. "Look here, Isabel."—Isabel looked, and turned pale as death.—"What is the matter with you, my dear?" exclaimed the affrighted Countess.

"Let us leave this place," said the trembling girl; "for heaven's sake let us go. That is the taper I threw down when I mounted the spectre's charger."

"What can you mean?" said the Duchess.

"It is the Marquis de Morbiere's," replied the terrified Isabel.

"You deceive yourself, Isabel," said Susan; endeavouring to quiet her fears. "It cannot have been found yet, if, as you say, you dropt it as you mounted."

"I am certain," replied Isabel. "Do, dearest Duchess, let us leave this place."

"I shall leave it this moment if there is any danger, my dear child," said the Duchess; "we had better call the aubergiste, perhaps he may give us some information concerning the taper."

"It will be the best plan," said Susan; and by her mother's request, summoned the inn-keeper.

Podevin immediately obeyed, and stood at a respectful distance to know what was desired of him.

"Can we have some refreshment?" said the Duchess.

"Any thing you like, madam," replied Podevin.

"Can you give us a fowl, and some wine?" inquired the Duchess.

"Certainly, Madam," replied Podevin; standing erect as an Austrian serjeant-major.

"Is it ready?" said she.

"Not quite, Madam," replied Podevin, relaxing a little; "we will catch one directly; it won't take long dressing."

"Thank you, thank you," said the Duchess; "we will do without it; give us any thing you have ready dressed." Podevin was going off to stir up the scraps of his larder; but the Duchess stopped him, "Who do these things belong to?"

"I will take them away, I beg pardon;" and Podevin was making for the things to take them out of her way, when his progress was again arrested. "I wish you to tell me who these things belong to?"

"To a young lady who occupied this room," replied the man, bowing several times.

"Who is she?" asked Susan.

"I do not know," replied the man; "she came with an old customer of mine who brought her here."

"What is your customer's name?" said the Duchess.

"His name is La Bruyère," replied the

aubergiste; "and as honest a man as any in the province."

"Where is he?" said the anxious Duchess.

"Just mounting his beast to go home," replied Podevin.

"Pray ask him to step here; I would like to speak a word with him." Podevin wondered in himself what the great lady could want with the humble farmer; but he knew his place too well to betray his curiosity, and went off to communicate her request to him.

"Who can the female be who owns this taper?" said Isabel; "there is something very incomprehensible in it."

"We shall know presently," said the Duchess; she was prevented saying more by the farmer's appearance in the room. He coloured, bowed, and begged to know what was the lady's pleasure.

"I wish," said the Duchess, "for very particular reasons, to know who this taper belongs to; can you have the goodness to tell me?"

"It belongs to a very unfortunate young damsel," said the farmer.

"Who is she?" said the Duchess.

"She escaped from a great wretch last night," replied the farmer; Isabel and Susan watching him with the most painful anxiety; "she took refuge in our house this morning, and I brought her here."

"Who is she?" said the Duchess; "she says," replied the farmer, "and I believe the poor damsel speaks truth, that she is going back to her master's castle."

"Who is her master?" exclaimed Isabel.

"The Count de Barsas," replied the man.

"It is my poor Margaret; my own dear Margaret," cried Isabel. "Oh! in pity send her here; no, no, show me where she is, let me go to her."

The astonished man stood motionless, gazing with wonder upon Isabel; "Show me the way," she cried: "show me the way."

Margaret who laid in disconsolate grief upon the bed, heard her name uttered from the lips

of her mistress; and seeking at once the well-known voice, rushed into the room, as Isabel was running out, and was caught in her arms.

It was long before Isabel had power to utter a word, and Margaret was as little able to speak as herself. The Duchess and Susan were delighted with the extraordinary rencontre, whilst the honest farmer wiped his eyes, betraying the natural tenderness of his heart, and the part he took in the happy change which had so suddenly been wrought upon the spirits of his charge.

The Duchess's congratulations reminded Isabel that others beside herself were rejoiced at the unexpected escape of her maid; and must be as desirous as she was, to hear how it had been effected.

Margaret told her what had happened, and related in every particular what she suffered from the brutality of Carl, and from the unprincipled Barbara.

She said that when she was carried to the

room where she was imprisoned, Carl addressed her in the coarsest language, and endeavoured to prevail upon her to let him return to her room at night; she of course made known her indignation, and declared that she would rather die. He then tried to embrace her, but she resisted effectually, and screamed as loud as she could. Her complaints brought no one to her assistance; although she cried till she was quite exhausted. Carl laughed and grinned at her, and declared that he cared not for her screams, as no one could hear her, and if they did, they would not dare come to her assistance.

Fancying that after a few minutes' consideration in a solitary prison, she would change her mind, Carl fastened the door, and promised to return in a little time. She was in momentary dread of his re-appearance when Baba called to her, and but for his generous intrepidity she knew not what would have become of her.

When Margaret had related the whole of her

story, she entreated Isabel to tell hers. The poor girl listened to the narrative with the greatest wonder, and many times asked her how she could have the courage to follow the ghost. Isabel had great difficulty to answer this question; she had put it herself a hundred times, and could attribute her compliance to nothing but an absolute miracle, or the dread of again falling into the Marquis de Morbiere's hands.

The honest farmer had not the least idea that he was trespassing upon the ladies, and was so taken up with the narratives which he heard, that he forgot poor Grizzle who stood outside the inn, turning about, pawing and neighing, in hopes to bring his dilatory master from the house; but La Bruyère heeded not, and as long as there was any thing to learn, and particularly any mention made of the ghost, he stood gazing alternately at Isabel and Margaret, as if doubting the possibility of their having in their tender years suffered so much, and having had such astonishing escapes.

The Duchess de Briançon, no less surprised than La Bruyère, had quite forgotten to thank him for his kindness to Margaret. As he was preparing to leave the room she recollected herself, and expressed herself in terms which made him feel the proudest man in the province. She then inquired what debt Margaret had contracted with him; but his face lengthened and betrayed evident displeasure.

"I do not wish to offend you," said the Duchess, perceiving the impression, "but pray tell me what you have paid for her."

"Nothing, Madam," said La Bruyère.

"You have surely been at some expense?" said she.

"None, Madam," replied the nettled farmer, making his bow to retire.

"Well, accept this," said the Duchess, attempting to force some gold into his hand.

"Thank you, Madam, I am not in need of it; permit me to decline it."

"You will oblige me," repeated the Duchess, fancying his reluctance was from modesty.

"It would destroy all the happiness I feel in having served the young lady," said the warm-hearted fellow. "If I am to put a price upon my little services, I will name it myself."

"I promise it before hand," exclaimed the Duchess. "What is it?"

"That, should that lovely young lady," said the farmer, pointing to Isabel, "ever come past our cottage, she will repeat to my wife the wonderful things which I have just heard."

"Granted," said Isabel; "I promise to call upon you the first time I go your way, and will even go some distance to procure myself the opportunity."

The farmer was thoroughly delighted, he came forward, kissed her hand, then wishing them a prosperous journey and that God might bless them all, mounted Grizzle, and rode off as hard as he could go.

The horses having been sufficiently baited, and every thing being in readiness to start,

the Duchess desired Isabel to lead the way, and they got into the carriage. Margaret was, by her request, admitted into it, that she might hear the plans proposed for her mistress's safety, and for her own.

As they left the inn, Podevin, his wife, and all their attendants, formed a guard of honour from the door to the carriage, and made as many fine speeches as the occasion would permit. The Duchess was too much accustomed to mimickry of the kind to pay much attention, and having goodnaturedly returned one or two of their salutations, gave the signal and drove off at the same steady pace as before.

The art of road making was still in its infancy, if it can be said to have existed at all at the time when the Duchess's weighty coach proceeded towards the castle of Briançon. It was therefore impossible to make much speed, and the massive structure of the vehicle, the heavy breed of the horses, and the inexperience of the coachman, each contributed to

impede their progress. Constructed as coaches were in those days, it is a question whether they would have borne the rapid motion of modern ones; even if the horses had been equal to so much draught with accelerated velocity.

In point of ease, they must have far surpassed ours, for they were exceedingly roomy, and those of the richer persons luxuriously cushioned, so as to afford means of rest, of which modern ones are destitute.

Five miles an hour was considered very fast travelling, and much more than it was in the power of the Duchess to accomplish. It was therefore nearly midnight before they arrived at the outer gate of the castle of Briançon.

When the guard of the watch had summoned the cavalcade and received the watchword, the drawbridge was let down, the enormous portcullis raised, and the carriage admitted. Like distant thunder it rattled as they went, and the profuse number of

torches with which the servants came forward to receive the Duchess proved that they were waiting for her, and testified the hearty welcome with which they were ready to hail her.

The carriage drew up in front of a large portico, and Isabel was handed out by the young Duke, who little expected, but was rejoiced to see her his guest at the castle; next followed the Duchess, Susan, and Margaret.

The Duke and his brother embraced their mother and sister with the tenderest affection, made many inquiries concerning their health, and rebuked them for not mentioning the happiness that was intended them. The Duchess vindicated herself by telling them that it was quite unexpected, and said that Isabel's journey was occasioned by some heinous occurrences of which she would inform them. They were instantly silenced, and the Duke gave Isabel his arm and led her into the saloon, where he welcomed her as though she

had been his own sister. The Duchess called her female attendants, and desired that every possible care should be taken of Margaret.

Supper being announced, the Duke led Isabel into the hall, where the party sat down to an elegant repast. Having taken little refreshment during the day, and being much tired with their long journey, they were faint, and Isabel, although she was not hungry, required something to revive her failing strength.

It was customary at the castle of Briançon to allow the domestics to retire during supper, for the Duchess looked upon the last meal as a time for drawing up the *resumé* of the day, and laying out the plans of the morrow. Necessary as servants are to the comforts of life, they are often the bane of sociability, and when matters of importance, or of interest, are to be discussed, it is always most prudent to exclude them. The Duchess was of this opinion, and her rule was observed as a law. Being left alone, the Duke begged to know

why Isabel looked so wretched, and whether any thing unfortunate had happened since her departure from the castle.

The Duchess related all that had befallen Isabel and her maid, and gave her sons a full history of the infamous conduct of the Marquis de Morbiere. They frequently appealed to their weeping friend to know whether what their mother said was really true, for they could hardly believe it, and felt the blood run cold within their veins when they heard of her miraculous escape.

They sincerely pitied the Count de Barsas, and as the Duchess told of his untimely end, poor Isabel sobbed convulsively, and was so wretched, that all they could do or say was insufficient to stem the torrent of her tears.

Unwilling to proceed with a subject so painful to their friend, they proposed retiring to rest, and after taking a most affectionate leave of her, the Duchess desired Susan to show her the apartment, which on her arrival she had ordered to be got ready for her. It was near

their own, and an adjoining room was allotted to the faithful Margaret, that she might be within hearing should her mistress want her services in the night.

END OF VOL.

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